

KEEPING DOGS SAFE IN INCLEMENT WEATHER

In response to some tragic situations, some lawmakers have sought to enact laws aimed at protecting dogs outside in extreme weather situations. In an effort to simplify the enforcement, many proposals define “extreme weather” by using a specific temperature range, and/or an active weather warning issued by the National Weather Service. These arbitrary laws, though well-intentioned, can have serious unintended consequences for dogs.

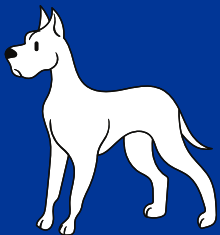
No one wants to see a dog in distress, but there are factors that must be considered to ensure an effective law that truly protects all dogs:

NOT ALL DOGS HANDLE TEMPERATURES IN THE SAME WAY



When developing legislation protecting dogs in inclement weather, it is important to remember that dogs come in all shapes, varieties, and sizes with characteristics that make them unique. No dog should be left in unsafe conditions; however, it should be noted that dogs are the most diverse species of animals. What is ideal for a Chihuahua is very different than the needs and tolerances of a Saint Bernard. There are a number of factors that impact a dog’s ability to handle weather including, breed, age and general health of the dog. Also, while specific temperature language is easy to enforce, such guidelines inadvertently put some dogs at risk. It could legalize temperatures that a dog may not be able to tolerate even for a short period of time, yet an owner could believe it is safe since, if passed, the law would allow it.

THERE ARE MANY REASONABLE AND HUMANE REASONS AN OWNER MAY HAVE A DOG OUTSIDE



Sometimes it is necessary for dogs to be outside briefly regardless of weather conditions. Many times, the owner may be near the dog when it is outside but may not be in visual range at all times, which is often a requirement in these types of bills. Also, if the owner does not have a fenced yard or the dog is not properly trained to stay in yard, the dog may need to be temporarily tethered for its safety. Yet under many of these bills, even this would not be permitted.

CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD BE MADE FOR PERFORMANCE AND WORKING DOGS



Many dog breeds participate in activities such as hunting, search and rescue, sledding, herding, sporting events (obedience and agility), and other activities that require dogs to be trained and acclimated. Bills using absolute temperature language do not allow for these activities and may prevent dogs from being trained or participating in these important functions.

A BETTER SOLUTION: FOCUS ON THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF ALL DOGS



Instead of arbitrary regulations, laws should instead state that “no dog shall be left in conditions where the health and safety of the dog is at risk.” This enables animal control to protect all dogs - including those that simply could not handle the extremes of an absolute temperature standard due to their breed, age or general health. This language also limits the need for exemptions for dogs that are with the owner, or training or working in conditions that are suitable for the breed, age, and general health of the dog.

AKC strongly believes no dog should ever be left in a dangerous situation. Taking the time to consider all the implications of proposed laws will result in a more comprehensive, effective policy that protects the lives of dogs.