

THE LEGAL BEAGLE

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There's Not Much of a Life on the End of a Rope or Chain

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Author: Megan A. Senatori
ms@dewittross.com
608-252-9395

The voice message arrived on a Saturday afternoon about a month ago. She left the relevant details in her plea for help. He had been left behind. His family moved. They tethered him to the garage when they left. Six months ago.

My friend, a compassionate dog lover, stumbled upon the poor dog when she visited the property as a prospective purchaser and found him tethered to the garage. The real estate agent told my friend that nothing could be done to help him. The humane society had already investigated complaints. However, the dog's family was stopping by the garage to provide him the basics. Food. Water. Shelter.

No law was broken. His spirit was another story entirely.

Is Tethering or Chaining a Dog Illegal?

According to Unchain Your Dog, a nonprofit animal welfare organization, only approximately fifty-four communities have laws that regulate or prohibit the practice of tethering or chaining dogs. In Wisconsin, tethering or chaining a dog is not a violation of state law. However, if a dog is tied or confined unattended outdoors under weather conditions which adversely affect the health of the dog, a shelter of suitable size to accommodate the dog must be provided.

At least two Wisconsin municipalities, the City of Racine and the Town of Linn, regulate the tethering or chaining of dogs.

What Exactly Is Tethering or Chaining a Dog?

Although the legal definition of "tethering" or "chaining" may vary, the Humane Society for the United States describes these terms as referring "to the practice of fastening a dog to a stationary object or stake, usually in the owner's backyard, as a means of keeping the animal under control."

Why Should Dog Owners Care About Tethering or Chaining of Dogs?

The United States Department of Agriculture, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the Humane Society of the United States believe that the continuous confinement of a dog by a tether or chain is inhumane.

Dogs are highly social animals. The physiological deprivation that accompanies days, months, years, or even a lifetime of constraint is too much for most dogs to bear. Dogs may resort to compulsive behaviors such as repetitive pacing, jumping, or barking to pass the boredom and loneliness of life on a tether or chain. Such dogs may become highly protective of their turf.

Tethering and chaining also has the potential for serious physical harm to a confined dog. Chains and tethers can be tangled around the dog's body, causing injury or even death. A tethered or chained dog without adequate shelter may suffer from the elements, such as frostbite in the winter or heat exhaustion in the summer.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, the tethering or chaining of dogs can have dangerous

consequences to society. Tethered and chained dogs are rarely exposed to human contact on a regular basis. As a result, they often become anti-social, aggressive, and fearful of all humans, not just the humans who have imposed their life sentence. In a study by the American Journal of Veterinary Medicine published in 2000, 17% of dogs involved in fatal attacks between 1979-1998 were restrained on their owner's property at the time of the attack.

Can Anything Be Done to Help a Tethered or Chained Dog?

A situation, like the one my friend described to me that Saturday afternoon, can seem hopeless. However, in reality there are many steps dog lovers can take to help a tethered or chained dog:

- **First things first.** Find out whether any laws prohibit or restrict the tethering or chaining of dogs in your community. If no such laws exist, create them!
- **Contact the authorities.** If you are worried about the safety or well-being of a tethered or chained dog, contact local authorities immediately. Although the tethering or chaining itself may not be a violation of existing law, a simple complaint, and visit from local authorities, may be enough to remedy the situation.
- **Education.** Humans do better when they know better. Many dog owners who tether or chain their dog have never considered their actions. Take steps to educate dog owners generally, and offending dog owners specifically, about the consequences of tethering and chaining of dogs.
- **Offer Assistance.** If offered tactfully and graciously, a dog owner with a tethered or chained dog may accept

assistance finding the dog a more appropriate home. Many rescue organizations rehabilitate and adopt confined dogs into loving families.

Conclusion

Often times, dog lovers encounter situations in which, while a dog is being mistreated, no precise law has been violated by the dog owner's actions. As communities become more aware of the consequences of tethering and chaining dogs, more and more are passing laws that either regulate the activity or ban it altogether. As of this month, the owners of the home have returned to their property and allow their family pet inside the home at night but begin the tethering ritual again each morning. As responsible dog owners, our responsibility is not only to our canine companions, but to every animal we see in need. Together we can educate others and persuade local governments to enact laws that ensure companion animals are safe in all circumstances.

For more information about the tethering and chaining of dogs, and what you can do to make a difference, visit Dogs Deserve Better, a nonprofit organization devoted to breaking the chains, at www.dogsdeservebetter.org.

For more information about communities who has passed tethering or chaining laws, visit Unchain Your Dog at www.unchainyourdog.org.

Megan A. Senatori practices civil litigation at the Capitol Square Office DeWitt Ross & Stevens S.C. She is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Wisconsin Law School where she teaches a course in animal law. Megan also teaches animal law at Marquette Law School and is a Co-Founder and Director of Wisconsin United for Furry Friends ("WUFF"), a non-profit animal welfare organization dedicated to creating a community of care for companion animals in Wisconsin through collaboration, coalition building and compassion. www.wuffinfo.org.



DEWITT
ROSS & STEVENS^{LLC}
LAW FIRM

Madison Office Two East Mifflin Street, Suite 600, Madison, WI 53703-2865, Tel 608-255-8891, Fax 608-252-9243
Madison West Office 8000 Excelsior Drive, Suite 401, Madison, WI 53717-1914, Tel 608-831-2100, Fax 608-831-2106
Milwaukee Office 13935 Bishop's Drive, Suite 300, Brookfield, WI 53005-6605, Tel 262-754-2840, Fax 262-754-2845

www.dewittross.com