

License Your Dog – It's the Law

By George Greig, Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture

Dogs are an important part of our families as loyal companions, protectors and playmates. Few things beat coming home after a long week to my Border Collie, Max, wagging his tail. His thirst for playing fetch is unquenchable and his energy on our Crawford County farm knows no bounds.

Max brings a lot of joy, but also a lot of responsibilities. Ensuring he has a current license is at the top of the list. That's why each year my wife and I stop by our local treasurer's office in December to purchase a dog license.

It's the Law

All dogs three months or older must be licensed by Jan. 1 of each year. Dog owners who do not license their dogs can be cited with a maximum fine of \$300 per unlicensed dog plus court costs.

Dog wardens canvass neighborhoods across the state looking for unlicensed dogs and fine any dog owners who break the law. Wardens issued more than 900 fines for failing to license a dog in 2013.

The cost of a license is far less than the penalty for being caught without one.

Get a License

Dog licenses are available from your local county treasurer. Some counties offer online licensing. Licenses may also be available through registered agents in certain counties, including retail businesses and veterinary offices.

An annual dog license is \$8.45, or \$6.45 if the animal is spayed or neutered. Lifetime licenses are available for dogs that have permanent identification like a microchip or tattoo. Older adults and people with disabilities may be eligible for discounts.

The dog license application is simple and only requests owner contact information and details about the dog being licensed, like name, age, breed and color.

Ticket Home

If you've ever walked or driven your neighborhood calling out your lost dog's name with the hope you'll see him running toward you, or visited your local animal shelter and registered your pet as missing, you know the importance of a dog license.

Pets run away for a variety of reasons. Big, strong dogs can run five miles or more from their homes. Along the way, they encounter dangers like moving vehicles and wildlife.

If your dog is found, someone may take him to a local veterinarian, groomer, pet store or animal shelter. If your dog has a current license, it makes his return home easy. But if your dog doesn't have a current license, it becomes harder to ensure he can make his way back to you.

Your best friend's ticket home is a license, because it helps animal control and shelters identify your dog and get him home safely.

Support Animal Control

Dog license fees support animal control. The annual fee you pay to license your dog helps keep shelters running and supports the work of the Dog Law Enforcement Office, which is responsible for ensuring the welfare of dogs, regulating dangerous dogs and overseeing annual licensing and rabies vaccinations.

Vaccinate Against Rabies

In addition to being licensed, all dogs three months or older must be vaccinated against rabies. Rabies is a fatal viral infection of the central nervous system that is spread by infected animals.

Lost dogs can easily encounter wildlife. Rabies in wildlife accounts for more than 90 percent of the reported rabies cases in the United States, with raccoons making up more than half of this total.

Rabies vaccination boosters must be given by your veterinarian to maintain your dog's immunity every three years. Failure to vaccinate your dog can result in a maximum fine of \$300 per unvaccinated dog violation plus court costs.

For more information about dog licensing, visit www.licenseyourdogPA.com.