



Are you a dog owner?

This brochure contains important information you need to know. It also tells you where to find further helpful advice about dog ownership.

Benefits of dog ownership

Owning a dog can be a lot of fun! Dogs give us company, affection and unconditional love. They encourage us to exercise – in fact many studies have shown that owning a pet improves your health. Dog ownership also teaches children responsibility, and helps them develop their social and nurturing skills.



Legal responsibilities

The law aims to protect animals from neglect and cruelty, and to protect the community from animals becoming a nuisance or danger.

This brochure outlines your responsibilities as a dog owner. If you don't comply with legal requirements, such as microchipping, registration, and confinement of dogs to the property, you can be fined. Note that there can be additional legal requirements depending on where you live. Check with your council to see if they have any local laws. For example, some councils have introduced compulsory desexing.

Under animal cruelty legislation, if you mistreat or fail to properly care for your dog you can be prosecuted and face fines, jail or a ban on owning an animal.

Where the owner of a dog is under 18 years of age, their parent or guardian will be deemed the legal owner of the dog in the event of any penalties or prosecutions.



Microchipping and registration

Health care

All dogs three months of age and over must be registered with the local council. Existing registrations must be renewed by 10 April each year. Dogs being registered for the first time must be microchipped prior to registration. Permits are required when there are more than a certain number of dogs or cats kept in a household. This number is set by your local council, so you need to check with them what the limit is.

Microchipping and registering pets greatly improves their chances of being returned to you if they become lost. If you move house, make sure you update your details with your local council, and also with the microchip registry (you have to contact both organisations separately).

Registration fees also provide a range of other important services. These services include animal control and community education about responsible pet ownership and dog bite prevention.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.

You must:

- Feed your dog an appropriate balanced diet to maintain him/her in good condition. Either too little or too much food, or the wrong type of food can cause health problems for your dog. Don't feed cooked bones to your dog, these can splinter and cause injury.
- Supply clean cool water at all times, in a container that cannot be tipped over.
- Provide a comfortable dry sleeping area, along with shade during the day.
- Protect your dog's health. This includes regular vaccinations, worming (including heartworm), flea and tick control, and veterinary treatment for injuries or illness.
- Give your dog plenty of company and time with the family. Dogs are pack animals. They are unhappy if left alone for long periods of time. They need the company of people or other dogs.
- Exercise and socialise your dog regularly – this is necessary for your dog's physical and mental health.
- Ensure your dog is adequately cared for when you are on holidays.
- Don't allow prohibited procedures such as tail docking or ear cropping to be conducted on your dog.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.



Desexing

If you aren't going to breed from your dog, have him/her desexed. You may have trouble finding homes for an unplanned litter of puppies. This could contribute to Victoria's pet overpopulation problem. There are many other benefits of desexing dogs. Desexed dogs can be better behaved and less likely to roam. Desexing pets can also prevent them from getting certain types of cancer. Refer to back of brochure for more information.

In general, dogs can safely be desexed from three months of age. Talk to your vet about the best age to desex your dog.

Confinement to the property

Legally, you are required to securely confine your dog to the property. This means your yard must have a closed gate, and an escape proof fence that your dog can not jump, get under or through. Visitors must also have safe access to your front door, without being stopped by your dog. If your dog could get through your gates or fencing, you can be fined even if he/she doesn't actually leave your property.

If securely confined, your dog will be safe from traffic injuries or fights with other dogs. He/she will also be prevented from wandering and becoming lost.

Confinement without exercise and socialisation, however, can lead to boredom, health issues or nuisance behaviour – see the next section for how to prevent these problems.



Socialisation, exercise and training

Socialisation means getting your dog used to behaving well when he/she is around other people and animals, and in different places. It is particularly important to socialise puppies – ‘puppy preschool’ classes are available at many vet clinics. The more situations your puppy is exposed to, and has positive experiences with, the better behaved and more confident he/she will be as an adult.

Dogs have evolved to spend much of their day migrating. The ‘need’ to walk is hardwired into every dog’s brain. Some dogs require longer or more regular walks than others. But all dogs should spend some time each day outside the property with you.

It does not matter if you have a large property – to a dog, this is still just a very big kennel behind walls! It is not natural for dogs to spend all their time indoors or in the yard – they need to connect with the world and be out in it.

Walking your dog through the streets or park is a primal activity that allows him/her to get to know the territory. Your dog will learn about the environment - other people and animals, and about dangers such as cars, and things to be avoided such as bikes. Walking your dog will help keep him/her mentally and physically healthy.

Energetic dogs may also require some time running off leash (check with your council about the location of leash free parks in your area). Many problems such as digging and barking arise because dogs are restless and bored. Often, these problems can be solved simply by giving dogs more exercise.

Provide your dog with toys, and rotate them regularly to keep him/her interested. You can keep your dog busy while you are out by giving him/her a large raw marrow bone to chew, stuffing hollow (indestructible) toys with food, or providing a large block of ice that has had some treats frozen into it.

Train your dog to ensure he/she is a good canine citizen and to stop him/her getting bored. Training means you have good control over your dog both at home and in the community. It may also prevent or treat behavioural problems. If you need help, ask your vet, local council, animal shelter or dog club/association for advice, or look under “Dog training” in the Yellow Pages.

You can also enjoy fun activities with your dog by joining an obedience, flyball or agility club. Find details of these clubs online, in the Yellow Pages, or by contacting ‘Dogs Victoria’.

Dog attacks

A dog of any size or breed can become aggressive when defending its territory. Even a friendly dog may guard the area on or around his/her property, especially when you are not present. Most dog attacks in public places occur on the footpath or road bordering the attacking dog's property. For this reason, it is important to make sure your dog is securely contained.

If your dog rushes at or chases someone, or bites a person or animal, you may be fined, and your dog declared as a "menacing dog". If your dog is involved in a serious attack on a person or animal, penalties can include court action, fines, damages and the declaration of your dog as "dangerous" or he/she may even be put down.

Additional laws apply to owners of restricted breed, dangerous, guard, menacing or attack trained dogs. Owners of these types of dogs can be jailed for up to 10 years if their dog kills someone, or for up to 5 years if their dog endangers someone's life.

It is important to know how to approach dogs safely, and what to do if you are approached by an aggressive dog. In particular, children need to be taught how to behave around dogs, and parents need to be aware of the importance of active supervision. Children, particularly those aged 0-4 years old, are most at risk of serious dog bite injuries. Research shows that 80% of hospitalised dog attack victims are bitten in private homes by their own dog, or that of a friend or neighbour.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.



Barking

Barking is a natural behaviour for dogs; it is one way they communicate. Excessive barking is often a sign that something is 'wrong'. The first step in solving the problem is to determine why your dog is barking (eg boredom, loneliness, to seek attention, to alert you of something, or due to fear/medical/physical reasons).

Depending on why your dog is barking, you may need to take him/her on more frequent walks, alter the backyard environment or make it more interesting (eg provide activity toys, bones to chew), take your dog to obedience classes/training, or take him/her to the vet for a check up.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.

Dog poo

Around 900,000 dogs in Victoria produce 90 tonnes of dog poo each day! Most councils require dog owners to remove and dispose of their dog's poo when in public places. Some councils also require owners to carry an appropriate receptacle (eg bag or scoop) to remove dog poo whenever they are walking their dog in public.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.

Transport

If you take your dog travelling with you in the car:

- Don't transport your dog in an enclosed boot (such as a sedan boot).
- Use a harness to keep your dog secure in the car. In the event of an accident, a harness will prevent him/her from being thrown about, or from, the car. This will prevent injury to your dog, and to other passengers.
- Don't leave your dog in a car if there is any possibility of him/her becoming heat stressed. Cars can heat up quickly on even mild days.
- If the dog is on the back of a ute, truck or trailer ensure he/she is tied on so he/she can't fall off. If using a metal cage to transport dogs, ensure it has a roof to provide shade, and that the sides are well ventilated (e.g. meshed rather than solid material). It is also advisable to cover metal floors of cages (and if tethering, the tray floor) with a surface such as rubber, as metal can heat up quickly and burn dogs' paws.
- Carry water with you to provide your dog with a drink.



Children and dogs

There are a number of education programs in Victoria which teach children (and their parents) about responsible dog ownership, and safety around dogs.

The “We Are Family” Program educates expectant parents and young families in relation to pets and children. It focuses on:

- Preparing the home environment and pets for the baby’s arrival.
- The importance of actively supervising all interaction between young children and pets.
- The need to securely separate children and pets when you cannot actively supervise them.

The Program is available in 70 Victorian hospitals with a maternity service and 800 maternal and child health centres. More information is available on the website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/pets/education-and-training

The “Living Safely with Dogs” Preschool Program is available to all registered preschools and involves both a child and parent session. It is designed to educate young children on when it is safe or unsafe to approach a dog and provides them with skills and strategies for approaching and dealing with unknown or aggressive dogs. Preschool children are at high risk of serious dog attack. The parent session covers the importance of active supervision and secure separation as well as providing important information on keeping their children and pets safe. Each preschool has been provided with a comprehensive teacher resource package. More information is available on the website

www.dpi.vic.gov.au/pets/education-and-training

The “Pets in the Community” Primary School Program begins the education process focussing on basic animal husbandry and our duty of care to our pets. Concepts include security, housing, identification, food, health, socialisation, exercise, training and safe behaviours. The program is available to all Victorian primary schools. Each school has received a comprehensive curriculum package. More information is available on the website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/pets/education-and-training



Declared Dogs

Under the Domestic Animals Act, “Declared Dogs” include:

- Dogs used for guarding of non residential premises (ie guard dogs).
- Dogs declared “dangerous” due to a serious attack on a person or animal.
- Dogs declared “menacing” due to a non serious attack on a person or animal, or rushing/chasing a person.
- Dogs that have been trained to attack.
- Dogs that are a “restricted breed” (these include Pit Bull Terriers and the Perro de Presa Canario). Note that restricted breed dogs can no longer be kept unless they were in Victoria prior to 1 September 2010, and were registered (as any breed) with the local council prior to 30 September 2011.

Strict housing and ownership requirements apply for declared dogs. Owners of these dogs also face potential jail terms if their dog kills or endangers the life of someone. Refer to back of brochure for more information.

Working dogs

A free booklet on “Working Dogs” is available from your local council, which covers topics such as dogs on moving vehicles, tethering issues, bushfires, stock attacks, and health issues specific to working dogs etc. Refer to back of brochure for more information.



Dogs and emergencies

It is important to plan ahead for taking care of dogs during bushfires or other emergencies:

- Ensure your dog is identified with a collar or tag as well as a microchip.
- Ensure that your details are correct in the microchip database.
- Ensure your dog's vaccinations are up to date.
- Prepare a dog emergency/disaster kit and place it in a prominent place; include food, water, bowls, leads, blankets/bedding, medication, and a labelled travel cage where necessary.
- Identify where you will evacuate your dog to. Check with your local council about evacuation options.
- If your plan is to evacuate, do so early on the morning of Severe or Extreme fire danger days, or the night before a Code Red day.
- If you are unable to evacuate, determine the safest area for your animals on your property to shelter from the fire front, and move them there early.

For more information about planning for your animals during the fire season visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies

Domestic Animal Businesses

Domestic Animal Businesses include: pet shops, pounds and shelters, breeding, training, boarding and greyhound establishments. These must be registered with the local council, and comply with Codes of Practice. These Codes of Practice are designed to protect your rights as a consumer, and to ensure the welfare of animals. Refer to back of brochure for more information.

If you can't keep your dog

Circumstances may arise that mean an owner is no longer able to keep their dog. In this case owners must find an appropriate new home for the dog, surrender him/her to the local council or an animal shelter or have a veterinarian put him/her to sleep (euthanase them). If your dog was purchased from a breeder, contact the breeder as he/she may be able to assist with rehoming your dog. Dumping of animals is an offence. If you are having an animal put to sleep it must be done humanely eg by a veterinary practitioner.

More information

Call your local council if you have any questions about your rights or responsibilities as a dog owner. They can help with wandering or nuisance pets too.

If you have an animal welfare question or are concerned about the welfare of another animal you can talk to your local veterinary practitioner, RSPCA or local council.

Call your local council to order free responsible pet ownership brochures on a range of topics. Fact sheets are also available online at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/pets. Topics include:

- Barking dogs
- Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Dogs
- Dog condition score chart
- Doggie doo – do the right thing
- How to prevent dog attacks in the home
- How to prevent dog attacks in the community
- Microchip for life
- Pet registration – value for your dollar
- Put your dog out back or it might put you in court
- Responsible ownership of working dogs
- The ten commandments of responsible pet ownership

- The time to desex is when you get your pet
- Things you should know about Dangerous Dogs
- Things you should know about Dog Training Establishments
- Things you should know about Guard Dogs
- Things you should know about Pet Shops
- Things you should know about Pounds and Shelters
- Things you should know about Restricted Breed Dogs

If you wish to know more about your legal responsibilities you can refer to the relevant Act and Regulations, these are: *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* and *Domestic Animals Act 1994*

These can be found at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/animalwelfare





**responsible
pet ownership**

Animal Welfare - it's your Duty to Care

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