Attack-trained police K-9s are commonly used by the police to apprehend criminal suspects

- Belgian Malinois are bred most frequently used by the police for suspect apprehension.
- Belgian Malinois were used in the capture of Osama bin Laden.
- Belgian Malinois are derived from lineages bred for heightened aggressive reactivity. Individuals are extremely athletic and easily trained.
- The police K-9 is assigned to a handler and together they form a “team”. When not on active duty the K-9 lives in the home of the handler.

**Epidemiology**

- The use of attack-trained police K-9s to apprehend criminal suspects sent about 3600 people to emergency rooms each year from 2005 - 2013. Almost all were male and Black men were overrepresented.
- 11% of all hospital emergency room visits for dog bites inflicted by a police K-9. The vast majority of police K-9 bites happen away from the home of the victim and have a 37% hospital admission rate.

**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SCIENCE AND THE INHERENTLY DANGEROUS NATURE OF ATTACK TRAINED POLICE K-9S**

**CONCLUSIONS**

The hereditary makeup of attack-trained police K-9s combined with the specialized training these dogs receive and their impulsive nature creates a dog with a strong desire to attack. These dogs when deployed in the field for suspect apprehension are emotionally aroused and are prone to making behavioral errors. As such they need to be kept under control at all times by competent handlers. In the absence of such control, these dogs often inflict severe dog bite injury to the suspects they apprehend and to innocent bystanders.

**ANIMAL BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS: Factors which explain why attack-trained police K-9s are inherently dangerous animals**

**GENETICS**

- Individuals are selectively bred from lineages with heightened aggressive reactivity towards people and low attack thresholds. These dogs are derived from Europe, temperament tested for their suitability for police work, and then sold to training facilities in the United States for subsequent sale to police departments.
- The Belgian Malinois has two polymorphisms in the dopamine transporter gene (SLC6A3). The SLC683 gene is associated with glazing over behaviors, episodic biting behaviors and general loss of clarity.

**AROUSAL**

- Aggressive tendencies in the police K-9 are enhanced and developed through hundreds of hours of “agitation” training often using shock collars. Training is usually done by individuals with little understanding of animal behavior science.
- Police K-9s are taught to apprehend suspects using the controversial training technique of “bite-and-hold”. This technique teaches the K-9 to viciously attack a suspect by biting, vigorously shaking, forcibly latching onto the suspect, and then holding its bite until commanded to release by its handler.
- Police K-9s are trained to bite forcefully. The estimated force of a bite is between 450 and 800 psi. Moreover, police K-9s are trained to inflict a “full mouth bite” by using all of their teeth to maximize their hold on a suspect.
- The act of attacking is a highly rewarding experience for the attack-trained Belgian Malinois. The animal behavior principles and mechanisms that govern the behavior and motivation of attack-trained police canines are different from those which govern the behavior of all domestic dogs.

**LEARNING**

- Aggressive tendencies in the police K-9 are enhanced and developed through hundreds of hours of “agitation” training often using shock collars. Training is usually done by individuals with little understanding of animal behavior science.
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- Police K-9s are trained to bite forcefully. The estimated force of a bite is between 450 and 800 psi. Moreover, police K-9s are trained to inflict a “full mouth bite” by using all of their teeth to maximize their hold on a suspect.
- The act of attacking is a highly rewarding experience for the attack-trained police K-9. The self-reinforcing nature of learnt aggression is well-documented in the animal behavior literature. Moreover, the handler may praise the K-9 during or after an attack which strengthens the dog’s desire to attack with shorter latencies and with less inhibition.

**IMPULSIVITY**

- Attack-trained police K-9s are impulsive. Impulsivity lowers the dog’s attack threshold, it interferes with the dog’s decision-making abilities, its ability to comply with vocal commands from the handler and its ability to differentiate suspects from non-suspects.

**Attacks on innocent bystanders: Risks to public safety**

**Attack-trained police K-9s are highly motivated to find a person to attack. Usually, the dog will find the correct suspect to apprehend.**

However, all too often innocent bystanders are attacked and severely bitten. These dogs when deployed in the field are on a mission and goal driven to find a person (suspect or not) to attack and bite. Unpublished research by this author found:

- Innocent bystanders are usually attacked when the dog is off-leash in pursuit of a suspect.
- 32% of attacks on innocent bystanders happen when the K-9 was not in service or in pursuit of a suspect.
- 18% of attacks on innocent bystanders happen when the K-9 is on a leash held by the handler.
- In 77% of the incidents, the victim was male.

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