

174.15 Penalty.

174.001 Definitions. As used in this chapter, unless the context indicates otherwise:

- (1) "Collar" means a band, strip or chain placed around the neck of a dog.
- (2) "Department" means the department of agriculture, trade and consumer protection.
- (2g) "Domestic animal" includes livestock, dogs and cats.
- (2j) "Intergovernmental commission" means an intergovernmental commission formed by contract under s. 66.0301 (2) by all of the municipalities in a county with a population of 500,000 or more for the purpose of providing animal control services.
- (3) "Livestock" means any horse, bovine, sheep, goat, pig, llama, alpaca, domestic rabbit, farm-raised deer, as defined in s. 95.001 (1) (ag), or domestic fowl, including any farm-raised game bird, as defined in s. 169.01 (12m).
- (4) "Officer" has the meaning designated under s. 95.21 (1) (b).
- (5) "Owner" includes any person who owns, harbors or keeps a dog.

History: 1979 c. 289 ss. 8m, 17; 1983 a. 451; 1995 a. 79, 316; 1997 a. 35; 2001 a. 16, 56; 2003 a. 133.

The casual presence of a dog on someone's property does not make that person a "keeper." "Harboring" a dog means to afford it lodging, to shelter it, or give it refuge; it does not include the transient presence in one's home of another's dog. *Pattermann v. Pattermann*, 173 Wis. 2d 143, 496 N.W.2d 613 (Ct. App. 1992).

There is a distinction between "keeping" and "harboring." Keeping generally requires exercising some measure of care, custody, or control over the dog, while harboring is often defined as sheltering or giving refuge to a dog. Thus, harboring lacks the proprietary aspect of keeping. However, the concepts of "harbor" and "keep" are similar, and the liability of one who harbors a dog and one who keeps a dog is the same. *Pawlowski v. American Family Mutual Insurance Co.* 2009 WI 105, 322 Wis. 2d 21, 777 N.W.2d 67, 07-2651.

The relevant consideration in deciding a question of "harboring" is whether the owner of the home knowingly afforded lodging and shelter to the dog. That an owner resided in a separate home from the dog and was not in a convenient position to and in fact did not exercise custody or control over or care for the dog, would be most relevant if the issue was whether the owner was a "keeper" of the dog, but not a harbinger. *Augsburger v. Homestead Mutual Insurance Company*, 2013 WI App 106, 350 Wis. 2d 486, 838 N.W.2d 88, 12-0641.

174.01 Restraining action against dogs.

(1) KILLING A DOG.

- (a) Except as provided in par. (b), a person may intentionally kill a dog only if a person is threatened with serious bodily harm by the dog and:
 - 1. Other restraining actions were tried and failed; or
 - 2. Immediate action is necessary.
- (b) A person may intentionally kill a dog if a domestic animal that is owned or in the custody of the person is threatened with serious bodily harm by the dog and the dog is on property owned or controlled by the person and:
 - 1. Other restraining actions were tried and failed; or
 - 2. Immediate action is necessary.

(2) INAPPLICABLE TO OFFICERS, VETERINARIANS, AND PERSONS KILLING THEIR OWN DOG. This section does not apply to an officer acting in the lawful performance of his or her duties under s. 29.921 (7), 95.21, 173.23 (1m) (c), (3), or (4), or 174.02 (3), or to a veterinarian killing a dog in a proper and humane manner, or to a person killing his or her own dog in a proper and humane manner.

(3) LIABILITY AND PENALTIES. A person who violates this section:

- (a) Is liable to the owner of the dog for double damages resulting from the killing;
- (b) Is subject to the penalties provided under s. 174.15; and
- (c) May be subject to prosecution, depending on the circumstances of the case, under s. 951.02.



(1) LIABILITY FOR DAMAGES CAUSED BY A DOG

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- (a) *Without notice.* The owner of a dog is liable for the full amount of damages caused by the dog injuring or causing injury to a person, domestic animal or property.
- (b) *After notice.* Subject to s. 895.045 and except as provided in s. 895.57 (4), the owner of a dog is liable for 2 times the full amount of damages caused by the dog biting a person with sufficient force to break the skin and cause permanent physical scarring or disfigurement if the owner was notified or knew that the dog had previously, without provocation, bitten a person with sufficient force to break the skin and cause permanent physical scarring or disfigurement.

(2) PENALTIES IMPOSED ON OWNER OF DOG CAUSING DAMAGE.

- (a) *Without notice.* The owner of a dog shall forfeit not less than \$50 nor more than \$2,500 if the dog injures or causes injury to a person, domestic animal, property, deer, game birds or the nests or eggs of game birds.
- (b) *After notice.* The owner of a dog shall forfeit not less than \$200 nor more than \$5,000 if the dog injures or causes injury to a person, domestic animal, property, deer, game birds or the nests or eggs of game birds, and if the owner was notified or knew that the dog previously injured or caused injury to a person, domestic animal, property, deer, game birds or the nests or eggs of game birds.
- (c) *Penalties in addition to liability for damages.* The penalties in this subsection are in addition to any other liability imposed on the owner of a dog.

(3) COURT ORDER TO KILL A DOG.

- (a) The state, any municipality, or a person who is injured by the dog, whose minor child was injured by the dog, or whose domestic animal is injured by the dog may commence a civil action to obtain a judgment from a court ordering an officer to kill a dog. The court may grant the judgment if the court finds both of the following:
 1. The dog caused serious injury to a person or domestic animal on 2 separate occasions off the owner's property, without reasonable cause.
 2. The owner of the dog was notified or knew prior to the 2nd injury, that the dog caused the first injury.
- (b) Any officer enforcing a judgment under this subsection shall kill a dog in a proper and humane manner.

(4) LAW ENFORCEMENT DOGS.

- (a) In this subsection, "law enforcement agency" has the meaning given in s. 165.83 (1) (b).
- (b) The owner of a dog that is used by a law enforcement agency is not liable under sub. (1) for damages caused by the dog to a crime suspect while the dog is performing law enforcement functions.
- (c) Subsection (2) does not apply to the owner of a dog that is used by a law enforcement agency if the dog injures a crime suspect while the dog is performing law enforcement functions.
- (d) Subsection (3) does not apply to a dog that is used by a law enforcement agency if the dog injures a crime suspect while the dog is performing law enforcement functions.

History: 1981 c. 285; 1983 a. 451; 1985 a. 92; 1993 a. 154; 1995 a. 181; 1997 a. 141; 1999 a. 45; 2015 a. 112.

Public policy does not prohibit insurance coverage for statutorily imposed multiple damages. *Cieslewicz v. Mutual Service Cas. Ins. Co.* 84 Wis. 2d 91, 267 N.W.2d 595 (1978).

Doubling of damages under s. 174.02 (1) (b) operates only after application of the laws of comparative negligence. *Sprague v. Sprague*, 132 Wis. 2d 68, 389 N.W.2d 823 (Ct. App. 1986).

To be a "keeper" of a dog within the definition of "owner" under this statute, the person must exercise some measure of custody, care, or control. An "owner" injured while in control of the dog may not use the statute to hold another owner liable. *Armstrong v. Milwaukee Mutual Insurance Co.* 202 Wis. 2d 258, 549 N.W.2d 723 (1996), 93-1918.

A landlord does not become a harbinger of a tenant's dog by merely permitting the tenant to keep the dog. *Malone v. Fons*, 217 Wis. 2d 746, 580 N.W.2d 697 (Ct. App. 1998), 96-3326.

Armstrong has no application when one who is neither an owner or keeper of the dog is injured. Sub. (1) imposes strict liability on an owner when the person injured is neither the dog's owner or keeper. *Fifer v. Dix*, 2000 WI App 66, 234 Wis. 2d 117, 608 N.W.2d 740, 99-1717.

An owner may sue a keeper for contribution when an innocent 3rd-party has been injured. *Fire Insurance Exchange v. Cincinnati Insurance Company*, 2000 WI App 82, 234 Wis. 2d 314, 610 N.W.2d 98, 99-1094.

A keeper of a dog may not recover under this section, notwithstanding an allegation that the actual owner was negligent. While the keeper may pursue a common law negligence claim, sub. (1) (b) and its provision of double damages are not applicable to that action. *Malik v. American Family Mutual Insurance Co.* 2001 WI App 82, 243 Wis. 2d 27, 625 N.W.2d 640, 00-1129.

A dog owner does not have notice under sub. (1) (b) because the owner knows that the dog as a puppy chewed on household items in the course of normal teething behavior. *Gasper v. Parbs*, 2001 WI App 259, 249 Wis. 2d 106, 637 N.W.2d 399, 00-2476.

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.2d 67, 07-2651.

Mere ownership of the property on which a dog resides is not sufficient to establish that an individual is an owner of a dog under this section. The totality of the circumstances determines whether the legal owner of the property has exercised the requisite control over the property to be considered a harbinger and thus an owner under the statute. *Augsburger v. Homestead Mutual Insurance Company*, 2014 WI 133, 359 Wis. 2d 385, 856 N.W.2d 874, 12-0641.

Recent changes in the statutory liability of Wisconsin dog owners: How expensive is fido? Eiche. WBB April 1984.

Unleashed: Wisconsin's Dog Statute. Mullaney. Wis. Law. June 2006.

174.042 Dogs running at large and untagged dogs subject to impoundment; penalties.

(1) DOG RUNNING AT LARGE.

- (a) Except as provided in par. (b), a dog is considered to be running at large if it is off the premises of its owner and not under the control of the owner or some other person.
- (b) A dog that is actively engaged in a legal hunting activity, including training, is not considered to be running at large if the dog is monitored or supervised by a person and the dog is on land that is open to hunting or on land on which the person has obtained permission to hunt or to train a dog.

(2) UNTAGGED DOG. A dog is considered to be untagged if a valid license tag is not attached to a collar which is kept on the dog whenever the dog is outdoors unless the dog is securely confined in a fenced area.

(3) DOG RUNNING AT LARGE OR UNTAGGED DOG SUBJECT TO IMPOUNDMENT. An officer shall attempt to capture and restrain any dog running at large and any untagged dog.

(4) PENALTIES. If the owner of a dog negligently or otherwise permits the dog to run at large or be untagged, the owner shall forfeit not less than \$25 nor more than \$100 for the first offense and not less than \$50 nor more than \$200 for subsequent offenses.

History: 1979 c. 289; 1983 a. 451; 1999 a. 50.

174.05 Dog license tax.

(1) REQUIREMENT. Except as provided in s. 174.054, the owner of a dog more than 5 months of age on January 1 of any year, or 5 months of age within the license year, shall annually, or on or before the date the dog becomes 5 months of age, pay the dog license tax and obtain a license.

(2) TAX. The minimum dog license tax is \$3 for a neutered male dog or spayed female dog, upon presentation of evidence that the dog is neutered or spayed, and \$8 for an unneutered male dog or unspayed female dog, or one-half of these amounts if the dog became 5 months of age after July 1 of the license year.

(3) ADDITIONAL TAX. The governing body of any county may by a majority vote of the members present at any regular meeting raise the minimum dog license tax on dogs within its jurisdiction and the governing body of any town, village or city may by resolution raise the minimum dog license tax on dogs within its jurisdiction. If the governing body of any county, town, village or city increases the minimum tax, it shall provide that the tax for unneutered male dogs and unspayed female dogs is greater than the tax for neutered male dogs and spayed female dogs. The additional tax may not exceed the total cost of all dog licensing, regulating and impounding activities for the previous year, less any refunds which may be received under s. 174.09 (2), and shall be levied and collected in the same manner as other dog license taxes.

(4) LICENSE YEAR. The license year commences on January 1 and ends on the following December 31.

(5) LATE FEES. The collecting official shall assess and collect a late fee of \$5 from every owner of a dog 5 months of age or over, if the owner failed to obtain a license prior to April 1 of each year, or within 30 days of acquiring ownership of a licensable dog or if the owner failed to obtain a license on or before the dog reached licensable age. All late fees received or collected shall be paid into the local treasury as revenue of the town, village or city in which the license was issued. The governing body of any county, town, village or city may, when setting the amount of the tax, provide that any person purchasing a dog license for a dog 5 months of age or over after April 1 shall pay an additional late fee.

History: 1979 c. 289; 1983 a. 451; 1991 a. 39.

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174.052 Publication of the dog license requirement and rabies vaccination requirement.

(1) JANUARY NOTICE. Except as provided in sub. (3), the county board of each county shall cause a class 1 notice under ch. 985 to be published between January 1 and January 15 of each year in a newspaper having general circulation in the county notifying the public that rabies vaccinations and dog licenses are required under the statutes.



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174.053 Multiple dog licenses.

- (1) **MULTIPLE DOG LICENSE OPTION.** Any person who keeps more than one dog may, instead of the license tax for each dog required by this chapter, apply to the collecting official for a multiple dog license for the keeping of the dogs. Such person shall pay for the license year a license tax of \$35 for 12 or fewer dogs and an additional \$3 for each dog in excess of 12. Upon payment of the required multiple dog license tax and upon presentation of evidence that all dogs over 5 months of age are currently immunized against rabies, the collecting official shall issue the multiple dog license and a number of tags equal to the number of dogs authorized to be kept by the person.
- (2) **MULTIPLE DOG LICENSE TAGS.** Multiple dog license tags shall be made in a form so that they may be readily distinguishable from the individual license tags for the same year. The owner or keeper of dogs for which a multiple dog license has been issued shall keep at all times a multiple dog license tag attached to the collar of each dog over 5 months old kept by the owner or keeper under a multiple dog license, but this requirement does not apply to a dog during competition or training, to a dog securely confined indoors, to a dog while hunting, or to a dog securely confined in a fenced area. An owner or keeper may transfer a multiple dog license tag from a dog that the owner or keeper no longer owns or keeps to another dog if the other dog is currently immunized against rabies. The rabies vaccination tag or substitute tag shall remain attached to the dog for which it is issued at all times, but this requirement does not apply to a dog during competition or training, to a dog securely confined indoors, to a dog while hunting, or to a dog securely confined in a fenced area. No dog bearing a multiple dog license tag shall be permitted to stray or to be taken anywhere outside the limits of the owner's or keeper's premises unless the dog is in leash or temporarily out for the purposes of hunting, breeding, trial, training, or competition.
- (3) **APPLICABILITY OF OTHER REQUIREMENTS.** Unless clearly inapplicable, all the provisions of this chapter relating to the individual dog license tax, licenses, and tags shall apply to the multiple dog license and tags.

History: 1979 c. 289 ss. 12, 18, 19, 21; 1981 c. 285; 1983 a. 451; 1991 a. 39; 2001 a. 16.

174.054 Exemption for owners of dogs kept for educational or scientific purposes. Sections 95.21 (2) (a), 174.05 (1) and 174.07 (1) (a) do not apply to a person who owns dogs that are kept only for educational or scientific purposes.

History: 1983 a. 451.

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