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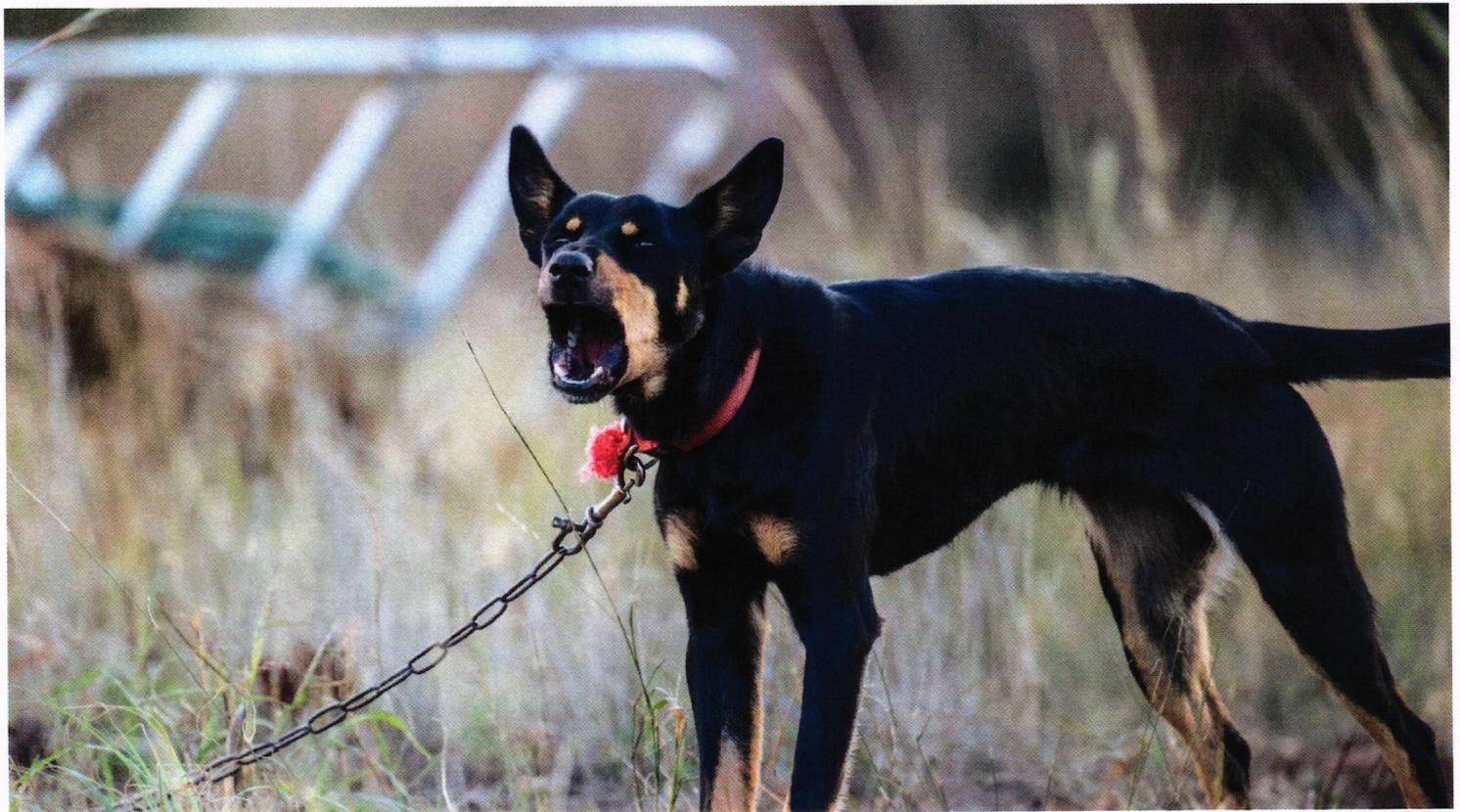
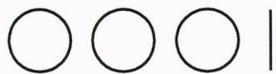
LIFESTYLE

New Texas dog law closing tether law loopholes goes into effect in January



Cathy M. Rosenthal, Animals Matter

Dec. 30, 2021





The Safe Outdoor Dog Act goes into effect on Jan. 18.
Stuart Walmsley /Getty Images

The Safe Outdoor Dog Act goes into effect on Jan. 18. It closes the loophole that required animal control officers and law enforcement to wait 24 hours before helping a tethered dog in distress, outlines proper protection from the elements,

requires dogs to have access to drinkable water and prohibits the use of chain restraints.

In 2015, the Texas Humane Legislative Network (THLN) began its effort to update Texas' Health and Safety Code to ensure humane treatment for dogs tethered and left unattended outdoors. The previous law failed to outline proper humane care for these dogs, failed to ban chains that can injure dogs, and required a 24-hour waiting period before law enforcement and animal control officers could help a dog in distress. Law enforcement and animal control officers wanted this law updated.

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“Usually when law enforcement needs something to enforce a law already on the books, it’s not so controversial,” said Stacy Sutton Kerby, director of government relations for the THLN. But trying to close these loopholes became challenging, and it took seven years for the Texas Legislature to pass the bill, which they did in May.

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“Everyone was elated,” says Kerby.

But Governor Greg Abbott vetoed the bill. Kerby said calls flooded her office from people wanting to know what they could do. She encouraged them to “politely, respectfully but persistently,” call their legislators and the governor’s office and share their support of the bill.

Thanks to that public pressure, Kerby says, the bill got reintroduced into a third special session in October. “We had 30 days to get it passed again,” she said.

The Safe Outdoor Dog Act, co-sponsored by a veterinarian, passed the legislation in October, 91 to 19.

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“What I love most about the final vote count is that even though six amendments were brought that night to try to undermine SB 5, the final vote margin was the biggest the Safe Outdoor Dogs Act had ever gotten,” says Kerby.

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“It was a long quest just to get a piece of health and safety code changed and was far more dramatic than we ever expected. But that sheds light on how hard it can

far more dramatic than we ever expected. But that sheds light on how hard it can be to pass animal welfare laws in a state as large and diverse as Texas.”

She said that some folks opposed the bill because they felt the government should not regulate how they handle their dogs. But the bill had the support of the Texas Veterinary Medical Association, the Texas Animal Control Association, and law enforcement.

If you want more information on this new law or need resources (a doghouse, fence repairs, etc.) to comply with the law, visit thln.org.

Cathy M. Rosenthal is a longtime animal advocate, author, columnist, and pet expert who has more than 25 years in the animal welfare field. Send your pet questions, stories, and tips to cathy@petpundit.com.



Written By

Cathy M. Rosenthal

Cathy M. Rosenthal has worked for both local animal shelters and national humane groups for more than 25 years. She also is a freelance writer for newspapers, magazines and nonprofit organizations, focusing solely on animal issues, pet behavior and the human/animal bond. Cathy is the author of several children's books on pet care.

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