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## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

## IMPACT STUDY INTO NUMBER OF DOGS THAT MAY BE WALKED SAFELY AT ONE TIME.

If I may begin by introducing myself and thus providing you with information enabling you to decide if I am qualified to give my opinion on the above subject.

I am an experienced dog trainer and behaviourist, having been so full time since 2008. I have a degree level qualification in canine behaviour management (A.Dip CBM) and currently have my own behaviour practice working exclusively on veterinary surgeon referral all over London and Surrey (veterinary references available).
Additionally, I am the Head of Training and Behaviour at the charity Veterans With Dogs where I oversee the entire training department and have full responsibility for the provision of assistance dog training for veterans with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and its associated mental health issues.
I also assess assistance dogs for the charity Dog AID (Assistance in Disability) and ultimately decide if they are of an acceptable temperament and level to become fully qualified assistance dogs at ADUK (the governing body for assistance dog charities) standards.

I am the resident training and behaviour expert for the magazine Dogs Monthly and expert contributor to Dogs Today magazine.
I am a member of the IMDT, Institute of Modern Dog Trainers
The British Veterinary Behavior Association
The Institute for Animal Care and Education and
The International Society for Animal Professionals.

I also consult on captive wild animal training and husbandry and have worked with zoos and wildlife parks both here and in the USA.

In the course of my behavior consulting work, I deal exclusively with dogs that have behavior problems over and above that which would be deemed training shortfalls. The bulk of this work is easily filled by dogs with fear related, dog-to-dog aggression.

My reasons for contributing this article **is that there is very real and very alarming evidence surfacing that dog walking practices are having a huge negative impact on the pet dog world.**

I have a definite increase in consultations as a direct result of a client either employing the services of a dog walker that walks more than four dogs at any one time, or whose dog encounters large groups of dogs being exercised by a dog walker on a regular basis.

The first concern for me is the level of time the dogs will be together in the close and very stressful confines of a vehicle. Even a well-fitted out, apparently comfortable vehicle is incredibly stressful for any dog if its immediate neighbour is howling, panting or barking. I have known dogs be together in these vehicles for up to two hours both ways, if they are unlucky enough to be first and last on the walker's rounds and the walker is collecting in excess of 4 dogs. Exposing even the most behaviourally sound dog to this experience continuously, will have an enormously negative impact (1). These dogs are then being walked with disproportionate amounts of exposure to the arousal and stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, which, without doubt, impacts the welfare of the dog (2).

The main examples of negative behaviours as a result of over arousal are aggressive and inappropriate responses to attempts by others at interaction, redirection of frustration to other dogs and humans and a complete inability to follow instructions (recall and polite lead walking), even where previously very responsive.
It should also be pointed out here that it is also impossible to effectively clean up after every dog if you are walking more than four and the majority are running free off lead. Studies show that over 76% of handlers walking a dog off lead fail to clear up after the dog has defecated (3). Much of this is because the dog's defecation is missed or in overgrown areas even though this is still a legal requirement to pick it all up (4). The average dog excretes 274lbs of waste annually and this waste contains almost double the bacterial microorganisms of human waste, therefore posing a very real and present health threat if not collected and disposed of correctly.

My second concern is that too many dogs are being walked together by one person. You have previously read through my qualifications and I must add an expert opinion here – I would never walk more than four dogs at any given time. Of these four dogs, all would have had an individual and then a group assessment before I accepted them. Their ability to cope with the close proximity of the other dogs in the group would have been looked at beforehand. Thus by minimizing the chances of the dogs becoming stressed, I would have the best chance at control of the group walk, both for those on and off lead. Many dog walkers have no knowledge or understanding of even the most basic canine stress signals and body language and are therefore oblivious to the dog's welfare status.

As for dog walkers walking their groups together, I can see no benefit here whatsoever. You cannot train two individual groups of six or more dogs! If you attend any dog training class, you will probably find it is run by a qualified and experienced dog trainer, usually with around six to eight dogs plus their handlers and there will often be an assistant trainer present. This is because it is physically impossible to not only read each dog's body language and thus prevent unwanted behaviours but to have any semblance of control over the group. How therefore can walking upwards of 8 dogs (I have counted as many as 24) be considered acceptable as a training method?

Sadly, as individual councils and parks recognise the above to be true and add restrictions of four dogs to their areas, unscrupulous walkers are now congregating in disproportionate numbers in the areas the restrictions are less stringent. These areas have now become impractical and unfeasible for the local residents to walk their own dogs in.

I believe there should be firm restrictions in place that prevent dog walkers taking out more than four dogs at one time and that it is stated that dog walkers must not walk their groups together.

Lastly, groups of dogs, running together off lead and out of the walker's control are little short of a dangerous menace. The negative impact a group of dogs running towards a dog on lead can have is immeasurable. I can personally cite cases where a previously sociable and well-adjusted dog has begun to show signs of defensive and/or protection aggression after these encounters and I can cite far too many to be purely anecdotal.

In addition to this, many responsible dog owners with their own reactive dogs are attempting behavior changing protocols or indeed simply trying to enjoy incident free exercise with their (under control) dog and are too often approached by free running, out of control dogs being exercised by inattentive dog walkers.

You will see the average cost of a group dog walk is now £12 - £20 per hour per dog. This means the dog walker can earn £48 - £80 per group walk by walking 4 dogs. This should be sufficient earning capacity as above this amount, the welfare of the dogs has been proven to suffer (1).

Walking four dogs means much less time in a vehicle, meaning the dog walkers can fit more walks into their schedule, so I don't believe the ruling would impact on their earning potential. All of us in the pet dog industry impose our own regulations upon ourselves; we limit our training class attendance and our behaviour clientele, even though this means reduced earning capacity, because it is morally right in an unregulated industry.

Irresponsible dog walkers are far less cost effective if they cause continuous issues for the dogs around them as well as some of those in their care as the average behaviour consultation costs around the same price as 10 walks!

(1) Chronic Stress in Dogs Subjected to Social and Spatial Restriction. II. Hormonal and Immunological Responses Original Research Article

Physiology & Behavior, Volume 66, Issue 2, April 1999, Pages 243-254
Bonne Beerda, Matthijs B.H Schilder, Wilbert Bernadina, JAN A.R.A.M Van Hooff, Hans W De Vries, Jan A Mol

(2) Manifestations of chronic and acute stress in dogs Original Research Article

Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 52, Issues 3–4, April 1997, Pages 307-319
Bonne Beerda, Matthijs B.H. Schilder, Jan.A.R.A.M. van Hooff, Hans W. de Vries

(3) **Factors Influencing Owners' Reactions to Their Dogs' Fouling**
**Deborah L. Wells**
School of Psychology, Queen's University Belfast

(4) https://www.gov.uk/control-dog-public/dog-fouling