

WALKING ANIMALS SAFELY

A notable number of veterinary workplace injuries occur while walking dogs. Risk factors include walking more than one dog at a time, walking while distracted (such as when texting), or not having a clear line of sight and tripping or falling. Improper footwear can also contribute to injuries. Employee trips and falls after becoming entangled in dog leashes are the most common injuries reported when walking dogs. Other injuries include strains and sprains from sudden tension on leashes, dog bites, contusions, and lacerations.

GUIDELINES FOR REDUCING YOUR EXPOSURE TO INJURIES WHILE WALKING ANIMALS

- Only lead or walk one animal at a time. Leading multiple animals can result in tangled leashes which is a serious trip and fall hazard. The animals can also become too difficult to manage, leading to injury from excessive strain on their leashes.
- Properly hold on to the leash. Do not wrap it around your wrist in a way that you cannot let it go if the pull gets too great.
- Keep the leash short. If it is too long, it can become entangled around your legs and pull you off balance. Long leashes also allow dogs to run forward and cause strains on shoulders and backs when they pull tight.
- Consider using leashes with shock-absorbing protection for lunging dogs.
- Walk dogs in a quiet area with an even walking surface that is fenced and away from other animals. If walking a dog off the property, know the hazards of the route and take precautions to avoid them.
- Keep pathways and areas devoted to walking animals clear of storage or other items that can become a trip and fall hazard.
- Before walking a dog, check the charts and kennel cards so you are aware of animals that have previously bitten staff or are hard to handle, as they require extra caution when opening cages to put on a leash.
- Wear proper footwear with slip-resistant soles and coverage for your entire foot.
- Carry a cell phone when working alone to call for help if needed but avoid talking or texting unless it is an emergency. Distractions can result in injuries.
- If walking dogs at night, wear reflective clothing and carry a headlamp or flashlight.

SAFETY QUESTIONS

What are the practice's policies regarding walking animals?

What leashes are provided and how should they be used to prevent injury?

What are the designated dog walking areas and what hazards, if any, exist within these areas?

How are animals that have bitten staff in the past or are difficult to handle designated on charts and kennels?

Which footwear is appropriate for walking animals?

ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES

Rush University Medical Center: <https://www.rush.edu/health-wellness/discover-health/preventing-dog-walking-injuries>

CVMA InLine: Practice Safety Resources: <http://cvma-inline.net/category/practice-safety/>