

Governor: One Dog, 2 Cats Per Family

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Belgorod's governor has infuriated animal lovers by banning all residents from walking dogs outside their homes and limiting them to one dog and two cats per household in what he called an attempt to control rabies.

Animal rights activists called the limits unconstitutional and complained to prosecutors, while veterinarians defended the ban as a wake-up call for negligent pet owners.

Dog owners will only be allowed to walk their pets in designated areas — including only two places in the city of Belgorod — under the orders issued by Governor Yevgeny Savchenko this month. As a result, thousands of dogs will be crowded into the city's walking grounds at any given time, "creating conditions ripe for an epidemic," said Galina Steblovskaya, head of a Belgorod-based charity helping stray animals.

Steblovskaya's charity has complained to regional prosecutors about the governor's order.

"I have the impression that the people who drafted this decision live on the moon and have never seen a dog rushing out for — pardon — a pee at 6 o'clock in the morning," said Tatyana

Pavlova, a leading animal rights activist who formerly headed Moscow City Hall's flora and fauna department, which oversees pet issues.

Russian law defines pets as property, and the Constitution bans authorities from limiting the amount of property or the place where it can be kept.

"If these animals have been vaccinated, how does rabies relate to them?" Steblovskaya said.

The governor's office pointed to rabies fears for the pet ban.

A total of 3,927 people went to the doctor after they were bitten by animals in the first 10 months of last year, compared with 4,065 in all of 2009, the Belgorod city web site Vbelgorode.com [said](#) in December.

A total of 263 rabies cases were registered in the region last year, including 89 among wild animals, mostly foxes, 85 in dogs and 72 in cats, the agency said.

It was not immediately clear whether anyone had died of rabies in the region. No one was available for comment at the regional branch of the Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service on Monday afternoon.

Valery Yevdokimov, head of the Belgorod city department for veterinary inspection, said limits on pets were necessary because some owners keep dozens of animals in unsanitary conditions, causing neighbors to complain to authorities about the stench of urine and waste.

Yekaterina Stepanova, a veterinarian at a Belgorod animal hospital, praised the limits as an opportunity to "shake up" pet owners who "buy anything that moves and bear no responsibility for them."

In Moscow, there is no direct ban on the number of pets that can be kept in an apartment. But federal law forbids owners from keeping more pets than they can provide good care for and orders them not to disturb the neighbors, Pavlova said.

Sanitary authorities have the right to confiscate even a single cat if they detect that the ammonia concentration from urine on public premises around the owner's apartment is higher than the norm, she said

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