

From the Chief Executive: A Morning with the Compliance Officers

In 2007, Council combined the roles of animal control and general compliance together to create new positions that we call 'Compliance Officers'. What it meant was that the same staff could go out to an area and look at a range of compliance issues at the same time. Makes sense – and yes, it is working well. We have a highly skilled team that now have more variety and satisfaction in their jobs. Compliance is not an easy role within Council, as our staff deal with many people on a daily basis that are wanting to do things in their own way in the community. Sometimes, what people want to do runs contrary to a law, or to a Council bylaw that was put in place only after consultation with the community. I went out in the Compliance truck recently to get a feel for their job 'at the coal face' and to see how this new role is working a year on. This is my diary of the morning with two of our officers, Derek and Brenda:

"The dogs in the Taumarunui Dog Pound are not what you imagine – they look tough, but in the Pound they are friendly, just wanting their food and their owners to come and get them. It's sad. We cleaned the Pound and fed the dogs. Our officers loved the dogs, and I guess you need this to be good at your job.

"After cleaning the Pound, we visited a property in R. Street where we spotted a dog without a tag, tied up. The dog had been well cared-for with water and shelter, but was not registered. All dogs need to be registered. We left a notice for the owners to contact Council to register their dog, and the officers will follow-up. We also visited another house in the same area with dog barking complaints to check the state of the dogs. This is a tricky issue which the Officers will monitor. I know in some places they give owners a 'bark restrictor' on trial, and wondered whether this would be a good idea for the Ruapehu also.

"Along T. Road we were pleased to see only one wandering dog (Boss), and took that back to the gentlemen who owned him nearby, with a reminder to keep his gate shut. Why am I pleased – well, we just did a Dog Registration campaign in this area which included information to the community and then follow-up with door-to-door checks to educate people on good dog care, and their registration requirements. This area had a lot of wandering dogs and some attacks on sheep that had to be cleaned up. The Compliance Officers knew many of the dogs by name which was impressive – I guess this is because they had newly registered many of them.

"We also went to a house that wanted permission for three dogs on property. For more than two dogs on an urban property, permission is required by Council. We found six dogs on the property, including one in a car, and a sheep as well! I understand that permission for three dogs on this property may well prove a struggle. Nearby, Derek asked some very tough gentlemen to get an old car off the grass verge, and they said they would by Thursday. Derek will re-check and, if not, it will be towed. Earlier they had told Derek that they would do this if their neighbour across the road got something of his off the road verge. Fair enough, thought Derek, and he went and spoke to that neighbour and they moved their object off the road verge.

"In Manunui we stopped off at an illegal dump site near K. Road, and then caught sight of a Dalmatian on the street. We took it back to its owner nearby and talked to her about running a wire down the side of her fence for a dog run."

The wisdom of widening the Officers roles to include all compliance issues certainly pays off in a morning's rounds. These guys are doing a great job out there for Council, taking a friendly and appropriate approach to their enforcement role. Quite impressive!