

Press Release

Countryside Recreation and the Lambing Season

With the lambing season well under way and the longer evenings, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr. Alan Kelly, T.D. and Comhairle Na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) are highlighting the responsibility of dog owners and the vulnerability of sheep to dog attacks.

“Dog owners must be mindful that with ownership comes responsibility,” said Minister Kelly. “Owning a dog means that you have to feed, house and care for your pet. However you must also remember that you have to keep them under control at all times. Never let your dog out unsupervised, especially at night,” the Minister added.

“Any dog, large or small, may become involved in attacking sheep.”

- MAKE SURE YOUR DOG DOESN'T GET THE CHANCE!

When taking part in any recreation activities in the countryside, care should always be taken to avoid disturbing farm animals and wildlife. This is one of the key principles of the Leave No Trace programme. Up to 2.5m lambs are born across the country at this time of year. Sheep flocks are very vulnerable to dog attacks at this critical time, and especially during the night. In addition, the presence of dogs even on a lead, can alarm sheep prior to lambing and have a detrimental effect on them and their lambs. Those engaging in recreational activities in the countryside (such as hillwalking) should not bring dogs onto hills or farmland at this time of year.

A dog attack is extremely stressful on sheep and can result in severe injuries or death. “We are all aware of the awful dog attacks on sheep over the past few months,” Minister Kelly stated. “This situation is not acceptable. Dog Wardens and An Garda Síochána are doing what they can but they cannot be in every part of the country at all times. The solution rests fairly and squarely with dog owners. Whether you live in or near the countryside, or visit it for recreational purposes, I ask that you be on your guard the whole time. Do not give your dog the opportunity to attack sheep and cause distress and pain to both sheep flocks and their owners.”

Dog owners can be held liable under the Control of Dogs Act for any economic loss. Some sheep never recover fully from a dog attack and can suffer ongoing health problems, including reproduction problems and nervousness. While it is recognised that the vast majority of dog owners are responsible, a momentary lapse in concentration can have disastrous consequences. Dog owners are requested to be particularly vigilant at this time of year and care should be taken to ensure all dogs are secure at night time.

How you can help:

Those taking part in countryside recreation can assist farmers through keeping their eyes open and reporting any activity by unaccompanied dogs to local landowners.

Through the Leave No Trace programme those who use the countryside for recreation can gain an understanding of the impact of their activities and learn techniques to prevent or reduce any negative impacts. Further information can be accessed at www.leavenotraceireland.org.

Comhairle Na Tuaithe

Comhairle na Tuaithe comprises representatives of farming organisations, state land managers, recreational groups and state bodies with an interest in recreation in the Irish

countryside. Comhairle Na Tuaithe was established in February 2004 to address three priority areas: access to the countryside; agreement of a countryside code and development of a national countryside recreation strategy.

Further information is available at

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/RuralDevelopment/NationalRuralDevelopment/ComhairleNaTuaithe/>

Note for the Editor:

For further enquiries please contact Rural Recreation Section Unit, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

Contact number: 096 24318

Contact email: CNaT@environ.ie