

SERVICE ANIMALS IN THE WORKPLACE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I've heard of Seeing Eye Dogs, but what is a Service Animal?

Answer: Service Animals are any animals highly trained to provide assistance to persons with a disability. While the majority is dogs, other animals such as miniature horses, monkeys, chimpanzees, and others can be Service Animals. They make it possible for people with disabilities to have and/or maintain their independence and quality of life. (For the purpose of this Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet, we will focus on dogs since they are the most widely used animals. All information is basically the same for any of the other animals.)

What exactly do Service Animals do?

Answer: Service Animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individuals with a disability cannot perform for themselves, or have difficulty performing. Seeing Eye Dogs lead a person who is blind; in essence, they see for their owner. Hearing Ear Dogs alert people who are deaf to ambient noises, such as doorbells, crying babies, oven timers, and hear for their owners. Other dogs pull people in wheelchairs, pick items up, open doors and drawers, and carry items. There even are dogs that can sense when a person is about to have a seizure. They make the owner aware one is impending, which gives the person time to lie down safely to prevent injury. The skills these animals possess are as wide and varied as the people who have disabilities that use them. Each animal's training is tailored to the specific needs of the owner.

But do we have to allow them to be here, especially if some employees do not like the idea of dogs being in the building?

Answer: YES. People with disabilities have a right to have trained Service Dogs as accommodations to assist them while working if needed, if they so choose, as required by Federal laws and other regulations. Allergies, apprehension, misconceptions, or fear of animals are not valid reasons for denying access to the Service Dog for the employee. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1992 revision provides for reasonable accommodations for qualified people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, known as the ADA, and its update, the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA), was patterned after the Rehabilitation Act and requires that all private businesses provide accommodations also. Therefore, you may see Service Animals in many places of business such as restaurants, theaters, banks, stores, etc. There are many other related regulations and policies that Federal agencies must follow. As

Federal employees we also are required to abide by all such laws, regulations, standards, and other Civil Rights policies.

But why have dogs in the workplace?

Answer: As stated previously, Service Dogs assist individuals to perform daily activities that they cannot do, or have difficulty doing. These activities include tasks done in the workplace. It is important to remember that Service Dogs/Animals are not pets. They have completed very intricate and extensive training. A large portion of this training is obedience, which is the foundation for every other aspect of the training. As a result, these dogs are some of the most well behaved and disciplined animals that you may encounter.

How safe are the dogs? Do they bite? Will they bark? Are they housebroken?

Answer: First and foremost, keep in mind that Service Dogs are well disciplined. They are working animals with specific purposes to their lives, that of to serve their owners needs. They are not attack or guard dogs. They have been taught to lie or move quietly in the workplace, as well as everywhere else. They will not approach you to be petted, fed, or played with, nor will they bark or growl. As for being housebroken, it is part of their training to take care of their bodily functions at the command of their owners only where it is appropriate. Employees must provide proof of appropriate healthcare and inoculations as well as training as a service animal.

Is there something I should or should not do when the animal is around?

Answer: Remember the Service Dog is working. Its focus is on assisting its owner and does not want to be distracted. Therefore, you should not pet it without permission, whistle or make other noises to get its attention, try to feed it, or perform any other action that may take it away from its work. Some Service Dogs wear harnesses, backpacks, or other items that help them in their duties and signify that they are working. The dogs know this and will not break out of their role without the owner's permission. Some owners only allow their dogs to associate with other people when the dog is home and out of their working "uniforms." Others will allow an occasional pat on the head by someone after granting permission, and still others never allow such actions from others. It is always best to ask the Service Dog's owner before you attempt to be friendly to the animal. And remember, this is **not** because it is a safety issue for you; it is because it is a *work* issue for the Service Dog.

There are a few more tips to keep in mind. The Service Dog is there to assist a person – your co-worker. Remember to speak directly to that person and not through the Service Dog. Sometimes

people are so fascinated or curious that they forget this. Also if you are curious, ask the owner some questions. Most love to have a chance to talk about their Service Dogs because of the deep and special bond that the two have developed from working together.

Another very important aspect is that the Service Dog is an extension of your co-worker. Making disparaging or derogatory remarks about the animal is the same as insulting and discriminating against your co-worker. As Federal employees we are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect. This behavior extends to Service Dogs and other Service Animals.

Numerous Federal agencies and other businesses have had Service Animals in their establishments since the mid-twentieth century. It is a routine fact of daily life for these employees. If it is a new experience for you, just give yourself some time to get used to it. After a while, you will realize that it is no longer new and you have become accustomed to it.

Note: Service Animals/Dogs are sometimes also called Assistance Animals/Dogs, or Companion Animals/Dogs. The terms mean the same. Which name is used is the owner's preference. However, Service Animal is the generally accepted term and seems to convey the appropriate meaning of a working animal assistant. Specialized names, such as Seeing Eye Dog, Hearing Ear Dog, Therapy Dog, etc., can also be used as appropriate.