

# EDITORIALS

## No dog days for EBMUD

Summer doldrums roiled by fuss over four canines

The dog days of summer are coming to an end, but not for an EBMUD work crew and an El Sobrante homeowner and his alert four-canine security force.

Unlike the conventional definition of dog days—a period marked by lethargy, inactivity or indolence—these days are anything but those lazy, crazy days of summer for the East Bay Municipal Utility District and Norman Fahmie.

Well, maybe we can keep the word “crazy” in the list ... crazy in the sense of ludicrous, preposterous, absurd and — can't omit the most important — extravagant.

The maintenance workers use an easement road that crosses in front of the family's home where the dogs live in order to get to two hilltop reservoirs.

The dogs are so menacing, the workers say, that there's talk of building a new water tank road to avoid the animals.

Whoever said “talk's cheap” is dog-gone wrong in this case.

EBMUD officials say establishing other routes could cost between \$180,000 to \$300,000 over 20 years for maintenance as well as the initial cost of paving, drainage and fencing.

Using the lower estimate, that comes out to a rather doggy \$45,000 per animal.

On the serious side, workers are entitled to a safe work environment.

“On the other hand,” as EBMUD board chairman John Gioia of Richmond says, “it seems unreasonable to have to spend \$200,000 or more to ac-

commodate four dogs.”

What's Fahmie's side of the story? “I've tried to be a good neighbor to EBMUD,” he says, “but they have some nerve trying to tell me I can't protect my family and my property.”

Fahmie also contends the friction increased when the utility changed maintenance crews. He says the old crews would feed the dog treats, “Then the crews changed and pretty soon they were calling in animal control and saying I had vicious killers.”

He has suggested the district move the gate where workers say they feel most threatened when they leave the truck to open and close it. That alternative is being checked out by officials.

He has also suggested workers call him before coming so he can restrain the dogs. Sounds reasonable, but the district's director of engineering, Marilyn Miller, is cool to the idea because she says Fahmie may not be awake or at home when the crew needs to get in during an emergency.

This is one of those neighborhood squabbles that never should have reached an impasse.

Give the advance notice idea a chance. It's not only courteous, but sensible. Try another kind of gate where the crew doesn't have to leave the safety of the truck if that's what's bothering them.

Try common sense and diplomacy. Although not the kind of diplomacy Will Rogers described as “The art of saying ‘Nice doggy,’ until you can find a rock.”

There's a way for both sides to stay out of the doghouse on this unseasonable dog-days brouhaha. And forget that doggy \$45,000-per-pooch road relocation.