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ogs in the Workplace

In recent years a number of businesses have introduced “Dogs at Work” policies in response to an increasing demand by dog owners to bring their pets into the workplace. The popularity of the annual ‘Bring your Dog to Work Day’ has grown enormously since the first event in 1999 while the proponents of allowing dogs into the workplace cite published research which claims to demonstrate positive effects on businesses through increased productivity and well being.

A study published in the International Journal of Workplace Health Management, found that dogs in the workplace may buffer the impact of stress during the workday for their owners and make the job more satisfying for those with whom they come into contact.

Although Britain is famously a nation of animal lovers, it is Americans who are leading the way in pet-friendly offices. A survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association found that nearly one in five companies welcomed pets in the workplace.

Figures for the UK are not readily available but would seem to be much lower although a survey of small businesses commissioned by animal charity Blue Cross found that 90% of companies who allowed dogs in the workplace noticed a positive change in the working environment; two-thirds claimed staff morale had lifted; 56% said the pets had improved work relations; and half reported a decrease in absences.

Employers have a legal duty to provide a safe and healthy working environment so there are clearly some facilities, such as manufacturing or food preparation where the presence of dogs would be wholly inappropriate. However in a general office, providing some sensible measures are taken by the owner, allowing dogs on site can be a positive initiative.

The dog owner needs to be able to control and care for their pet during the day as well as carrying out their own duties so this will restrict those who could benefit. Any facility manager considering allowing pets on site should also check lease and tenancy agreements as some landlords do not allow animals on the premises.

The type and temperament of the pet also needs to be considered, as not all dog breeds are suited to assistance work. Some companies have written Dogs at Work policies that set out some rules allowing employees to bring well-behaved pets to work and it seems that the recipe for success with this initiative is when employees understand that such policies are a privilege and not a guarantee.

Information about Take your Dog to Work Day can be found at www.takeyourdog.com