Responsible Dog Ownership: A Guide for SOFA Members in Okinawa

BLUF: As a SOFA member in Japan, you are legally and financially responsible for your dog's actions both on and off base. Compliance with the Joint Service Pet Policy and Japanese law is mandatory.



On-Base Regulations: Joint Service Pet Policy

All residents in Military Family Housing (MFH) on Okinawa must adhere the Joint Service Pet Policy. To maintain safety and quality of life, the following standards are strictly enforced:

Requirement	Description
Control	Owners must maintain control of their pets at all times. This includes preventing excessive barking, howling, or disturbing neighbors.
Restraint	Outside of fenced areas, dogs must be on a leash, harness, or in a carrier. Voice commands are not considered a valid form of control.
Waste Disposal	Animal waste must be picked up immediately, bagged, and disposed of in the trash.
Health	All pets must maintain current immunizations.
Physical Ability	Handlers must possess the physical strength to manage the dog in any situation.

For the full policy, refer to the Joint Service Pet Policy for All MFH on Okinawa (https://www.housing.af.mil/portals/79/documents/afd-120525-022.pdf).

Off-Base Regulations: Japanese Law

When off-base, you are subject to Japanese law. Owners can face both criminal and civil penalties for their dog's conduct.

Japanese Penal Code (Article 209)

If your dog causes bodily injury to another person, you may be prosecuted and receive a fine of up to 300,000 yen (approximately $2,000–$3,000 depending on exchange rates).

Japanese Civil Code

Victims have the right to seek civil remedies against both the owner and the individual caring for the dog at the time of an incident. Be highly selective when choosing a caretaker for your pet.

Liability and Precautions
Even with precautions, your liability remains. It only takes a moment for a dog to escape quarters, break a leash, or crawl under a fence.



Breeding Restrictions
Certain breeds, including Pit Bulls and Rottweilers, are prohibited in all MFH areas in Okinawa.

Yard Safety
You can still be held liable for attacks that occur within your own yard or home, even if the dog is leashed.

Signage
"Beware of Dog" signs may warn others, but they do not relieve the owner of legal responsibility if an injury occurs.