

Risks of Shock Collars and Fences

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There are many options available for new pet owners when it comes to training the new member of the family. The most controversial method of training is the use of shock collars or shock fences. Many stories and photos have surfaced in the media recently showing animals who have been harmed by these devices.

The main reason some pet owners have chosen to use shock collars is to stop their dog from barking. There are two types of shock collars commercially available. One type is remotely controlled by the owner and the other is activated by a bark. Shock fences are a little more technical and are used to keep the dog inside a designated boundary. The pet owner buries wires in the yard that mark the boundary the pet can encompass. If the pet crosses this boundary, the collar located on its neck will deliver a shock.

According to Dr. Bonnie Beaver, veterinarian at Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, "In theory, they provide an instant punishment for a bark (the bark activated shock collars) or for a wrong move (remote controlled ones) when training a dog." However, the potential for over use and abuse of these devices far outweighs the benefit.

There are many instances where shock collars and fences do not work. Beaver offers this example in reference to shock fences, "Strong instincts to chase (a running deer, a jogger, a stray dog) may cause a trained dog to chase through the boundary. Some dogs do not respect the shock and will run through the 'boundary' suffering the shock as they do." This has been found in many cases, rendering the shock to be unsuccessful.

Many people have found shock collars and fences to be not only ineffective but also inhumane. "These devices [shock collars and fences] can provide an excessive punishment to the point that the dog is terrorized," said Beaver. "They can be ineffective because the amount of shock is too little (poor contact, too much hair, weak battery). They can be used out of context (remote control) because the owner is mad at the dog and 'zaps' at an inappropriate time out of anger. It can also do significant psychological damage to a dog that does not connect the shock with the reason for the shock. The shock is generally considered to be inhumane."

There are many more humane methods for training that have been found to be more effective. Beaver suggests, "collars for barking dogs that squirt a citrus smell and make a hissing sound that have actually been proven to be more effective than the shock collars. And of course there are real fences for yards that are safer and more effective than the shock fences."

About Pet Talk

Pet Talk is a service of the College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Texas A&M University. Stories can be viewed on the Web at vetmed.tamu.edu/news/pet-talk. Suggestions for future topics may be directed to editor@cvm.tamu.edu.

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