

INVISIBLE FENCING, TIE OUTS, TETHERS, CHAINS, ELECTRIFIED FENCES AND OTHER OUTDOOR RESTRAINING METHODS

INHERENT DANGERS TO CONSIDER

Before anyone purchases or uses any “invisible fencing” type product, there are inherent and serious dangers people should be aware of and consider. These same dangers apply to any “tie out”, “tethering”, “chaining”, “electrified fencing”, or other outdoor restraining products and methods. *NOTE: Electrified fencing, tie outs, tethers, and chaining used to secure a dog present many dangers to the dog. They often cause physical, mental, and/or emotional damage to a dog, EVEN WHEN used inside a secure fenced yard area!*

Let’s examine the mechanics of invisible fencing. There is an underground wire that must maintain proper “connections” to provide the “shock” to the dog when they approach the fence. Additionally, for the fence to operate and produce the shock to your dog, the special collar worn by the dog must also work properly. This relies on the connections in the collar and a battery. If any “one” element of the product malfunctions, for whatever reason, your dog is outside with nothing to contain them within your specified area.

Possible malfunctions include (but are not limited to):

** The buried wire loses its grounding or connections. This can be caused by any number of naturally occurring factors including the ground shifting, water saturation, or a foreign object accidentally making contact with the wire moving the wire or breaking it. And of course, ANY product can have a malfunction unto itself.

** The collar connections become damaged or dirty.

** The battery going bad or losing its juice.

Even a very responsible owner who checks the collar and fence on a weekly basis could still have one of these situations spontaneously occur between checks. All it takes is ONE time for something to happen and your dog runs free to be hit by a car or get lost. There are countless stories of a person who let their dog out without a leash because their dog “always” returns home, that is EXCEPT the “one” time they didn’t. Or, their dog “never” runs off UNTIL the “one” time they did! Ask yourself if you are willing to risk your dog’s life against the odds that nothing will ever occur with the invisible fence or the collar. Personally, I am not willing to bet my dog’s life on that “one” time.

Some specific examples I am personally aware of include:

** A neighbor knocking on a friend’s door to alert my friend that her three dogs were in his yard (two streets away). They had to cross a busy street to get there. The underground connection had somehow been broken.

** Another person never left her dogs outside without her supervision. One day she was watching out the window as one of her dogs ran out of the area and across a busy street. The other dogs stayed. When she checked, the battery in the one dog's collar had stopped working. The batteries in the other dogs' collars were still working.

Let's look at the dangers invisible fencing type products pose to your dog every time they are outside, even when the fence and collar DO work properly.

** FACT: Invisible fencing products may keep your dog IN their area (if you are lucky). It does NOT keep other animals and dogs OUT! For other animals or dogs to have free access to your dog is absolutely NOT safe. There are neighborhood dogs who roam free or get loose from their yards. There are also feral dogs who come into neighborhoods. Your dog could be jumped, mauled, or killed by one or more animals or dogs at any given time.

Even if you are home, the damage can be done before you can react. Also, you could be in danger when you try to intervene. Consider a recent situation that was related to me by a client. She was walking her small dog on a leash. A large "off leash" dog rounded the corner (owner some distance behind). As soon as this "off leash" large dog spotted the small dog, he charged at the woman and her dog. She managed to get her dog into her arms, but she was no match for the large dog who in one fell swoop grabbed the small dog from her arms. It took both owners to free the small dog from the large dog's mouth. While the small dog did survive, the damage was massive. The injuries included a couple of broken ribs, a collapsed lung, damage to the intestines (part of which were hanging out), damage to the stomach and the bladder. Major surgery did somehow manage to put the small dog back together.

** FACT: Invisible fencing products do not protect your dog from humans (adults or children). Unfortunately the reality of the world we live in is that people do taunt, tease, and/or physically abuse dogs. Granted, this can occur even with a chain link fence, but when the people have easy, unencumbered access they can do more damage. As aware as I am of what can happen to a dog at the hands of people who do unsavory things to dogs, I actually came across a situation which I had not thought of before. I saw four teenage boys with sticks chasing and running down a dog (German Shepherd). When I got out of my van to stop this obvious abuse, I realized the dog had an invisible fencing collar on. These boys knew about invisible fencing and the "shock" mechanism. They were getting their kicks by cornering and chasing the dog back and forth over the fencing line causing the dog to be shocked over and over. I have no idea how long this had been going on, but the dog was terribly cowered and his tongue was hanging almost to the ground.

I will not go into more graphic examples of what happens to dogs at the hands of humans when they are confined by invisible fences, electrified fences, tie outs, tethers, and chains. Most of you are more than aware of these horrors as they are constantly reported in newspaper articles and on local television news shows.

**** FACT:** Invisible fencing does not protect your dog from people who drive through neighborhoods looking for dogs “to steal”. While some of these people do this to get a “reward” for returning a “lost” family pet, there is a far more unsavory and lucrative reason people steal dogs. Many laboratories pay money for dogs to be used in their experiments. Still other people look for dogs to use as “bait” in training their fighting dogs.

People looking for dogs to steal will take them out of regular fenced yards when the gates are not locked, or lift a dog over a 4’ fence, climb over the fence, or even use wire or bolt cutters to get through the locks or the chain link fence. So, even a regular fenced yard may not protect your dog if these unsavory people are that determined. However, the same concept applies to this situation as occurs with car thieves encountering a locked car versus an unlocked car. Thieves will always prefer the “easy” mark to one that requires time and effort. If these people drive through a neighborhood and a dog is basically “free” in their yard but contained by invisible fencing, this dog will not run off and is an easy mark. The people will take an ostensibly free/loose dog over the dog next door that is in a regular fenced yard because it takes less time and effort.

Note: My dogs are house dogs, but do enjoy their yard. When I bought my house, it had a 4’ chain link fence. I promptly put up a 6’ chain link fence. Additionally, I never leave my dogs in the yard without checking on them frequently. And, I NEVER leave them outside even for a short trip to the store.

**** FACT:** There are some dogs who will be motivated to “suffer” the shock to get to something that is of high enough value to outweigh the temporary pain or discomfort of “the shock”. For example, the high value item could be a “critter/animal” for the breeds or individual dogs with a high prey drive.

If you consider all of these possible and probable scenarios, it is easy to see why I am ADAMANTLY opposed to any invisible fencing type products. Additionally, I think you can see the direct correlation between what I have discussed regarding invisible fencing, electrified fencing, tie outs, tethers, chains, and other outdoor restraint methods. In fact, there are some municipalities that have outlawed the use of ANY of these products or methods for securing a dog outdoors.

Please take all of this information under consideration when deciding whether to use any of these approaches for securing your dog in your yard. IF you live in a community that does not allow “regular” fencing for aesthetic reasons, then perhaps you should not have a dog. Or, if you do own a dog in one of these environments, I recommend that you find a more amenable and safe manner to exercise and potty your dog. The facts I have presented are the facts. They cannot and should not be ignored.

A CLOSER LOOK AT TIE OUTS, TETHERS, CHAINS, AND SIMILAR OUTDOOR RESTRAINTS

When dogs are kept on any type of a physical restraint, many of the scenarios discussed above are possible and probable. However, there are other dangers and problems connected with this type of restraint. Dogs restrained by something around their neck are not only at risk of the aspects discussed previously, but actual dangers and injuries from the actual restraint mechanism. If they take off to run after something, they will be clothes-lined. This can cause serious damage to their throat, trachea, or larynx. If the restraint is connected to a collar or choke chain or the restraint mechanism also serves as the “collar”, this running and hitting the end of the restraint with that much force can cause whatever is around the neck to tighten to a level that the dog’s airway is restricted or cut off entirely.

Dogs can get a chain or rope or other restraint item wrapped around a leg. Then when they take off to run after something they can actually break the leg. The dogs can get tangled in the restraint or the restraint can get tangled or wrapped around something to the degree the dog can no longer reach their food or water bowl. They may not be able to get out of the sun or out of the elements. They may not be able to urinate or defecate except right where they are standing. Some dogs have become so entangled or their restraint has become so entangled that the dog cannot even sit, much less lay down.

NOTE: I am addressing this section to help “well meaning or well intentioned” owners recognize the dangers and health issues related to using tie outs, tethers, chains, and other outdoor restraint methods. I DO NOT address these concerns to owners who INTENTIONALLY subject their dog to the horrors of being chained out, tied out, or similarly restrained. There is no excuse for restraining a dog by any of these methods for the sheer sake of abuse, neglect, and cruelty. There are far too many cases of exactly this happening. Watch just one week of the Animal Planet shows that deal with neglect, abuse, and cruelty. One of the most common scenarios of cases presented on these shows have to do with dogs who are chained or tied out in some manner!

EMOTIONAL DAMAGE

As a behaviorist who works closely with many different “rescue” groups, I can assure you that the dogs who find their way into rescue and have been kept on some sort of a chain or tie out restraint method have enormous emotional baggage. Some dogs become very withdrawn, timid, shy, or fearful of the entire world and everything in that word. Others can be very reactive in an overtly aggressive manner. Different dogs internalize what they have experienced, lived through in different ways. All of these dogs are emotionally scarred. Many can be rehabilitated. Some can learn to trust people, trust their environment, and even trust other dogs. Some cannot. Some dogs cannot be rehabilitated from this type of existence and life.

I entreat owners who find they have a dog they cannot handle or control or houstrain or as owners just decide they no longer like or no longer want to be bothered by the dog, please DO NOT tie out or chain up the dog. This is the cruelest thing you can do. Moreover, if the dog ever has a chance at a better life or a family who would love them, if you have subjected them to this situation they may well be emotionally damaged

beyond repair. I am PLEADING with you that if you find yourself not liking the dog or for whatever reason thinking you need to chain them or tie them up, please...please... take them to a “no-kill” shelter or contact a rescue group for that breed or an “all breed” rescue group. With the Internet, there is no excuse for subjecting ANY dog to this kind of life. It is NOT a life, it is a prison sentence.

Copyright © 2006 COME, SIT, STAY...Canine Etiquette, I love it when you...TALK DOG TO ME. All rights reserved. Articles and E-book chapters may be printed for the reader's personal use ONLY. They may not be reproduced for any other reason without the expressed, written permission of the author.

DEB DUNCAN
COME, SIT, STAY...*Canine Etiquette*
Behavior and Training Consultations
www.thedogspeaks.com