



## **Electric Fence: To Use or Not To Use**

An electric fence is a wireless, in-ground or 'invisible' fence that is installed around the perimeter of a property, creating an invisible boundary. A dog contained within the boundary of the fence wears a 'shock', 'remote' or 'e-collar' around his neck (and sometimes around his groin or at the base of the tail) which consists of a transmitter designed to deliver a 'static correction' should the dog stray too close to the boundary. Flags are placed at intervals around the perimeter as a visual marker.

When dogs first learn to stay within the 'fence' they inevitably receive a series of electric shocks, which supporters of these fences claim is harmless. Of course, any kind of aversive such as shock has to be relatively strong in order to be effective, and while the dog might learn to quickly associate one flag or part of the property as a no-go area, his natural curiosity will inevitably lead to subsequent shocks should he get too close to other untested areas during the 'learning' process.

But the likelihood of shocking the dog is only the first of many reasons why electric fences should be avoided at all costs.

### **Why Should You Say NO To an Electric Fence?**

- Some dogs are so traumatized after just one shock experience that a fear memory is imprinted in the brain forever. While this sometimes provides enough motivation to avoid the boundary in the future, it also absolutely leads to countless other fear-based behavior issues and breaks down the human/animal bond significantly.
- Some dogs will refuse to go into their yards, while others have suffered electrical burns from the very collars fence companies claim are 'safe and humane'.
- Many dogs break through the boundary to get to something on the other side regardless of the pain they experience or because the fence has malfunctioned in some way. Many of these dogs end up getting lost, hit by cars or picked up by animal control officers (dog wardens) who regularly find these dogs wandering around the neighborhood.
- Once a dog has gone through the boundary and been shocked, he is almost guaranteed to avoid coming home because he knows it means another shock.
- Dogs contained behind electric fences tend to become more reactive and in some cases more aggressive toward strangers and even family members. A recent study found that dogs without previous aggression problems attacked family members when the system was activated.
- Similarly, delivery personnel or any guest or family member can be an unwilling victim of a dog's pent up frustration.
- Any dog that is left outside for long periods of time is likely to develop a fence running habit, barking at cars, people or other animals as they go by, but this behavior is a lot more prevalent in dogs that have an uninterrupted view. Fence running is an unhealthy activity that exacerbates frustration, irritation and aggression and regularly becomes a fixed action pattern the dog performs in other contexts and environments, such as on a walk.

- Dogs that live within the confines of an electric fence are also at the mercy of other animals and people that may wander onto their property, and with no visible boundary, these dogs are at greater risk of being stolen. Pedigrees have a high resale value while mixed breeds are regularly stolen to be used as bait in dog fighting circles or for medical research.

Electric fence companies would like you to believe that their 'fences' are the perfect solution for containing your dog, offering 'safety, comfort, and peace of mind,' but do not be fooled by clever marketing. While the idea of allowing your dog to experience more unsupervised 'freedom' might be an attractive option for you, the simple truth is that electric fences rely on pain to deter dogs from escaping and the risks of anxiety and aggression issues, theft and increased legal liability are too high.

## **Positive Alternatives to Electric Fences**

While no fence can offer a hundred percent protection, a solid fence will do a much better job keeping your dog in and others out. If you do not have a physical fence around your property, keep your dog inside your home and take him out for regular toilet breaks and walks or invest in a solid fence around, or smaller 'dog run' within your property. It is a much safer, more humane and effective containment option than an electric fence will ever be.

### Scientific Studies About the Effects of Electric Fences:

- Considerations for shock and 'training' collars: Concerns from and for the working dog community (Overall)  
*Journal of Veterinary Behavior* (2007) 2, 103-107
- Training Dogs With the Help of the Shock Collar: short and long term behavioural effects  
(Schilder, van der Borg) *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 85 (2004) 319-334
- Can aggression in dogs be elicited through the use of electronic pet containment systems?  
(Polsky) *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 2000 Vol. 3 No. 4 pp. 345-357
- The Use of Shock Collars and Their Impact on the Welfare of Dogs  
(Blackwell, Casey) *Department of Clinical Veterinary Science University of Bristol* 2006