

Electric Shock Collar Evidence Paper

Electric shock collars cause pain and anxiety:

Studies into the use of electric shock collars have shown that this is a stressful and painful method of controlling a dog's behaviour.¹ Electric shock collars produce physiological effects - a dog's body will respond to a shock in the same way that it would to a real injury (increased heart rate and cortisol levels), even if no physical harm has been incurred.² This leads to visible signs of stress and behavioural responses associated with fear, such as yelping, cowering, defecating and urinating.³ A study conducted by Tsevtkov et al. also suggests that conditioning a dog in this way causes chemical changes that contribute towards intense anxiety disorders, including posttraumatic stress disorder.⁴

Mr John D Tucker reported the following to the Kennel Club:

"I was walking with my Labrador, Snowball, when he was attacked without any provocation or warning by a Doberman, Eli, who was wearing an electric shock collar. During the attack, the owner triggered the collar which simply further enraged the dog. When the owner finally got Eli under control, she took him about 15 yards away, made him sit, and proceeded to give him a prolonged shocking which caused him to howl, whine, yelp and writhe in pain, the whole time telling the dog "It's your own fault Eli, you shouldn't attack other dogs!"

Electric shock collars are an ineffective training method:

K. Overall states that: "The use of shock is not treatment for pets with behavioural concerns" as it fails to address the causes of unwanted behaviour.⁵ Research indicates that the stress response to electric shock collars actually impedes a dog's ability to learn.⁶ Studies suggest that unwanted behaviour returns when the collar is removed, as a dog is only conditioned to respond when the shock stimulus is present.⁷ Anti-bark shock collars are also ineffective because barking is part of a dog's natural behaviour; a dog cannot control the shock because they can never learn to associate their bark with an electric pulse.⁸ Any changes in behaviour are a result of "learned helplessness" or "immobility" and therefore this method does not alter any of the underlying behavioural issues a dog might have.⁹

Studies comparing the use of the shock collar method with positive reinforcement techniques, suggest that rewarding a dog for good behaviour can produce a much more balanced and obedient dog.¹⁰ It is also much more effective to keep dogs on leads around livestock and sheep, as these studies show that electric shock collars cannot teach a dog to stay away.

The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors 2007:

"A rescue Border Collie...was given electric shock collar treatment on two occasions for chasing sheep, as the first occasion had no effect. After the second occasion the dog stopped chasing sheep locally. However when the owners travelled out of the area to go on holiday in Cornwall the collie chased sheep again. It provided a false sense of security for the owners, who thought their dog was 'cured' when in fact it was not reliable."

Electric Shock collars cause further behavioural problems:

Numerous scientific studies indicate that electric shock collars can cause a dog to develop behavioural problems, especially increased aggression.¹¹ As a dog is unable to identify the cause of pain, it is likely to associate a shock administered from the collar with something in its immediate environment. The dog may therefore start to develop 'superstitious' fears to elements of its surroundings that are heard or seen at the time of the shock, such as birds, wind, grass and even other dogs and children.¹² Consequently, the risk of dogs attacking other dogs, their owner or another animals close by at the time of the shock is increased.¹³ These signs of aggression also

form part of the “fight or flight” response that a dog will exhibit if subjected to a situation that causes pain and fear.¹⁴

Brighton Evening Argus, Thursday 25 October 2001:

“A woman who used (remote control) electric collars in a bid to tame her dogs today called for them to be banned after her pets killed another dog. She sought the help of a behaviourist when (the dogs) started to run away...but the first time the dogs got a shock was by mistake, after a small dog they were walking past made Miss Langridge jump. From then on her pets associated the shocks with small dogs and became afraid of them”. Miss Langridge described the incident: “I saw an old lady walking towards me with her little Shih Tzu...As she passed my dogs went for her dog...It was taken to the vet but they had to put it down...(my dogs) had never harmed anything before. They grew up around animals...I realised they connected the pain of the electric shock with little dogs because of the first time I used the collar.”

Electric shock collars can be used irresponsibly or malfunction:

Electric shock collars are widely available for purchase by mail order, via retail outlets and on the internet; they are therefore available to anyone who, with no training or supervision whatsoever, can place them on a dog and administer 'correctional' treatment. Consequently, an angry or inferior trainer, or even novice owner, could misuse a collar to abuse and punish.

Shock collars are also prone to malfunction; research has shown that electric shock collars may react to ambient noise and extraneous radio signals.¹⁵ They are also unable to discriminate between different kinds of barking (i.e. barking that occurs during play, aggression or pain).¹⁶

Pat Miller via 'The Whole-Dog-Journal.com - A Monthly Guide to Natural Dog Care & Training':

“Rufus had this green colour round his neck under the training collar. I carefully removed the collar to find a huge gaping hole in Rufus' neck, under one of the prongs”. Dr Susan Benson of the Animal Medical Centre in Preston, Idaho who treated Rufus' injuries claimed: “This was one of the worst electrical burns I have seen other than dogs who have had contact with high power lines.”

A letter from Lesley Gray to the UK Leonberger Association:

“At a recent event one of the participants put an electric shock collar (anti-bark collar) on a dog to stop it barking. The dog screamed in agony and panic. As the collar was noise activated, the more she screamed, the more the collar administered shocks. Within a few days the dog had lost all the fur from her neck.”

¹ Schilder, M. B. H, van der Borg, J. A. M. (2004); Polsky, R. H. (1994)

² Lindsay, S. (2005)

³ Tortora, D.F (1982); Soloman, R.L, Wynne, L.C (1953)

⁴ Tsevtkov, E, Carlezon, W, Benes, F, Kandel, E, Bolshakov, V. (2002)

⁵ Overall, K (2007)

⁶ Walker, R, Fisher, J, Veville, P. (1997); Mendl, M, (1999); Hiby, E.F, Rooney, N.J, Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2004)

⁷ Polsky, R. H. (1994); M.E.P, Maier, S.F, Geer, J.H. (1968)

⁸ Juarbe Diaz, S.V, Houpt, K.A (1996); Seksel, K (2003)

⁹ Overall, K (2007)

¹⁰ Hiby, E.F, Rooney, N.J, Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2004)

¹¹ Heacock, D, Thurber, S, Vale, D. (1975); Hutchinson, R. (1973); Polsky, R. H. (1983); Ulrich, R. (1996);

Hiby, E.F, Rooney, N.J, Bradshaw, J.W.S. (2004)

¹² Polsky, R. H (1994)

¹³ Reisner, I.R. (2003); Tortora, D.F. (1982)

¹⁴ Carolyn Menteith, Association of Pet Dog Trainers, <http://www.apdt.co.uk/press.htm>.

¹⁵ Wells, D.L. (2001); Polsky, R. H (1994)

¹⁶ Polsky, R. H (1994)