

THE ASSOCIATION OF PET BEHAVIOUR COUNSELLORS

Shock Collars - the Shocking Truth From an APBC press release

The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors condemns the widespread use of devices which deliver electric shocks to dogs for the purpose of training or curing behaviour problems. Their potential for accidental misuse is high and they could easily cause considerable and unnecessary pain and distress to the animal.

A dog experiencing an unpleasant shock to the neck 'out of the blue' will associate the sensation with whatever the dog happens to be focusing on at the time. Used incorrectly, this could be an area, object, another dog, the owner or even a child. Unwanted side effects could easily occur when the dog being shocked becomes afraid of being in that area, or it could become afraid of, and as a result, potentially aggressive towards owners, children, other dogs or strangers.

In inexperienced hands, it may take many repetitions of administrations of the shock before the punishment is finally associated with the unwanted behaviour, and several more before the dog learns how to avoid the shock by performing the 'correct' action. Not only is this inhumane, but can set up a series of fears which can cause associated behaviour problems in future.

In addition, it is possible that the device may be triggered by external influences, or malfunction, which may result in delivery of repeated shocks, particularly in those devices which are designed to be triggered by barking and are put onto dogs left alone for long periods.

Sophisticated methods of punishing dogs are not necessary in order to train them to behave appropriately. Such methods are often used as a quick fix by the inexperienced. Humane methods which rely on a sound understanding of the dog's mind are more effective for training or bringing about a lasting cure for behaviour problems. Results may take slightly longer to achieve, but the process benefits from being less stressful for the dog, free from the risk of side effects, and improves rather than spoils the relationship between dog and owner. In the long run, they will result in a happy, confident dog and satisfied owner.

Only in a handful of cases, where all else has been tried and failed, and when the condition is potentially life-threatening, can the use of such devices ever be justified, and, only then, in the hands of an experienced behavioural specialist who is capable of accurate timing.

Owners of problem pets need to be made aware that the unwanted behaviour can be altered with understanding and advice and that a 'quick fix' approach which involves inhumane methods of punishment can do more harm than good.