

The Facts About Chaining and Tethering

Why this practice is cruel to dogs

The Humane Society of the United States



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Have you seen chained dogs in your neighborhood and wondered whether leaving a dog outside is humane? Here are some frequently asked questions about chaining and tethering dogs and why it's considered inhumane.

What is meant by "chaining" or "tethering" dogs?

These terms refer to the practice of fastening a dog to a stationary object or stake, usually in the owner's backyard, as a means of keeping the animal under control. These terms do not refer to the periods when an animal is walked on a leash.

Is there a problem with continuous chaining or tethering?

Yes, the practice is both inhumane and a threat to the safety of the confined dog, other animals and humans.

Why is tethering dogs inhumane?

Dogs are naturally social beings who thrive on interaction with human beings and other animals. A dog kept chained in one spot for hours, days, months or even years suffers immense psychological damage. An otherwise friendly and docile dog, when kept continuously chained, becomes neurotic, unhappy, anxious and often aggressive.

In many cases, the necks of chained dogs become raw and covered with sores, the result of improperly fitted collars and the dogs' constant yanking and straining to escape confinement. Dogs have even been found with collars embedded in their necks, the result of years of neglect at the end of a chain.

Who says tethering dogs is inhumane?

In addition to The Humane Society of the United States and numerous animal experts, the U. S. Department of Agriculture issued a statement in the July 2, 1996, Federal Register against tethering:

"Our experience in enforcing the Animal Welfare Act has led us to conclude that continuous confinement of dogs by a tether is inhumane. A tether significantly restricts a dog's movement. A tether can also become tangled around or hooked on the dog's shelter structure or other objects, further restricting the dog's movement and potentially causing injury."

How does tethering or chaining dogs pose a danger to humans?

Dogs tethered for long periods can become highly aggressive. Dogs feel naturally protective of their territory; when confronted with a perceived threat, they respond according to their fight-or-flight instinct. A chained dog, unable to take flight, often feels forced to fight, attacking any unfamiliar animal or person who unwittingly wanders into his or her territory.

Numerous attacks on people by tethered dogs have been documented. Tragically, the victims of such attacks are often children who are unaware of the chained dog's presence until it is too late. Furthermore, a tethered dog who finally does get loose from his chains may remain aggressive, and is likely to chase and attack unsuspecting passersby and pets.

Why is tethering dangerous to dogs?

In addition to the psychological damage wrought by continuous chaining, dogs forced to live on a chain make easy targets for other animals, humans, and biting insects. A chained animal may suffer harassment and teasing from insensitive humans, stinging bites from insects, and, in the worst cases, attacks by other animals. Chained dogs are also easy targets for thieves looking to steal animals for sale to research institutions or to be used as training fodder for organized animal fights. Finally, dogs' tethers can become entangled with other objects, which can choke or strangle the dogs to death.

Are these dogs dangerous to other animals?

In some instances, yes. Any other animal that comes into their area of confinement is in jeopardy. Cats, rabbits, smaller dogs and others may enter the area when the tethered dog is asleep and then be fiercely attacked when the dog awakens.

Are tethered dogs otherwise treated well?

Rarely does a chained or tethered dog receive sufficient care. Tethered dogs suffer from sporadic feedings, overturned water bowls, inadequate veterinary care, and extreme temperatures. During snow storms, these dogs often have no access to shelter. During periods of extreme heat, they may not receive adequate water or protection from the sun. What's more, because their often neurotic behavior makes them difficult to approach, chained dogs are rarely given even minimal affection. Tethered dogs may become "part of the scenery" and can be easily ignored by their owners.

Are the areas in which tethered dogs are confined usually comfortable?

No, because the dogs have to eat, sleep, urinate and defecate in a single confined area. Owners who chain their dogs are also less likely to clean the area. Although there may have once been grass in an area of confinement, it is usually so beaten down by the dog's pacing that the ground consists of nothing but dirt or mud.

How else can people confine dogs?

The HSUS recommends that all dogs live indoors as a part of the family, are taken on regular walks, and otherwise provided with adequate attention, food, water and veterinary care. If an animal must be housed outside at certain times, he should be placed in a suitable pen with adequate square footage and shelter from the elements.

Should chaining or tethering ever be allowed?

To become well-adjusted companion animals, dogs should interact regularly with people and other animals, and should receive regular exercise. It is an owner's responsibility to properly restrain her dog, just as it is the owner's responsibility to provide adequate attention and socialization. Placing an animal on a restraint to get fresh air can be acceptable if it is done for a short period or while supervised. However, keeping an animal tethered for long periods is never acceptable.

If a dog is chained or tethered for a period of time, can it be done humanely?

Animals who must be kept on a tether should be secured in such a way that the tether cannot become entangled with other objects. Collars used to attach an animal should be comfortable and properly fitted; choke chains should never be used. Restraints should allow the animal to move about and lie down comfortably. Animals should never be tethered during natural disasters such as floods, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, or blizzards.

What about attaching a dog's leash to a "pulley run"?

Attaching a dog's leash to a long line—such as a clothesline or a manufactured device known as a pulley run—and letting the animal have a larger area in which to explore is preferable to tethering the dog to a stationary object. However, many of the same problems associated with tethering still apply, including attacks on or by other animals, lack of socialization and safety.

What is being done to correct the problem of tethering dogs?

More than 100 communities in more than 30 states have passed laws that regulate the practice of tethering animals. Maumelle, Ark., and Tucson, Ariz., completely prohibit the unattended tethering of dogs. Many other communities only allow tethering for limited periods of time or during certain conditions. Orange County, Fla., for example, does not allow tethering between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or during times of extreme weather.

Why should a community outlaw the continuous chaining or tethering of dogs?

Animal control and humane agencies receive countless calls every day from citizens concerned about animals in these cruel situations. Animal control officers, paid at taxpayer expense, spend many hours trying to educate pet owners about the dangers and cruelty involved in this practice.

A chained animal is caught in a vicious cycle; frustrated by long periods of boredom and social isolation, he becomes a neurotic shell of his former self—further deterring human interaction and kindness. In the end, the helpless dog can only suffer the frustration of watching the world go by in isolation—a cruel fate for what is by nature a highly social animal. Any city, county, or state that bans this practice is a safer, more humane community.