

(E-Collar) Remote Training and Hunting Hounds

Training and Control of Hounds

- There are no objective criteria or training guidelines nor any testing requirements to certify hounds are trained. What constitutes a “trained” hound and the concept of “control” are open to interpretation. They will vary in meaning from handler to handler and according to each person’s personal feelings and thoughts on the subject (12, 15, 20, 21, 27, 28, 41).
- Predatory behavior in dogs is the hardest and most dangerous behavior to control.
- Hunting hounds work together and run in packs (24). They are highly aroused while chasing animals and bay and bark loudly when in pursuit (24).
- The direction in which a pack of hounds travels is determined by the animal being chased, and the pursuit can last for miles. These factors are completely out of the control of hounders. Hounds routinely run into roads and traffic and onto private property while chasing wild animals.
- Hounds are out of sight and off leash throughout most, if not all, of the hunt. They can often be miles away from their handlers. Hounders pursue hounds by truck based on where the hounds’ tracking collars indicate they are headed or might be.
- A handler cannot have control of a dog when that dog is off leash and out of sight or hearing range.
- Hounds are transported in tiny metal dog boxes in the bed of a pickup truck, so they have no orientation as to their starting point when released.
- In order to practice a “recall,” dogs need a point to return to, which should be the handler. However, hounders continuously change their locations and position while chasing the hounds. If a hound did return to a previous point in the chase, the overwhelming likelihood is that no hounder would be there.
- Hunting hounds routinely get lost and displaced due to not having any orientation as to their whereabouts.
- During “training” season, untrained and unleashed hounds are purposely released to chase wildlife, including nontarget animals.
- Hounds run on private property and pose a serious safety risk to the public and to companion and domestic animals.
- Hounders regularly trespass on private property in pursuit of their dogs.

Remote Training

Remote systems can be marketed as vibration, tingle, e-touch, stim, stimulation, tens, tap, remote trainers, delivery collars, e-collars, e-prod, and training collars. They are manual, radio-controlled systems that enable the user to deliver a shock to the dog's collar from a hand-held transmitter. The collar has a small box containing metal electrodes that penetrate the dog's fur and press directly onto the skin. The electrodes can deliver a painful shock to the dog with a press of the button from the handheld remote. Some trainers attach shock collars to other parts of the dog's body such as the stomach and genitals (2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 16, 18, 19, 22).

- There are over 100 styles of e-collars and systems on the market with various settings, ranges, options, battery life, and reliability (23, 31). Shock collars usually come with instructions provided in printed materials or on manufacturers' websites. Each remote system involves a learning curve for the user (32, 35).
- Multiple dogs can be programmed into the system, with each collar having its own setting or toggle/button. An electric stimulation can only be sent to one collar at a time.
- E-collars utilize shock and the principles of fear-conditioning to "punish" the dog via trial-and-error learning for a perceived or potential misbehavior (5, 38). Dogs must be repeatedly shocked in multiple situations to understand what the shock means or when they might receive it (38, 43). Initially, and sometimes throughout the entire training process, the dog does not know when or why s/he will be shocked. It's an extremely stressful and confusing way for dogs to learn (38). Fear conditioning can have lifelong negative effects on a dog's behavior and well-being (8).
- E-collars, as any other training tool, require perfect timing (7). Shock is a punishment. For shock to be effective, it must be administered within, *at most*, a second or two of the behavior. Mistimed or inappropriate shocks are unpredictable, confuse dogs, and create anxiety (5, 7, 8, 16, 40, 42, 43, 44). Even small errors can lead to profound and damaging effects on a dog's well-being (3, 5, 7, 8, 16, 44). Unqualified trainers are more likely to produce negative outcomes when using shock collars (7, 40).
- E-collars do not train or teach dogs commands (9, 11, 33). A shock collar is a tool to reinforce behaviors the dog already knows at a distance (9, 11, 33). If the dog doesn't know a command, the e-collar cannot teach the dog what to do (9, 11, 33).
- E-collar training is associated with well-documented risks to dog welfare (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 14, 16, 40, 42, 43, 44). Existing behavioral problems are likely to worsen and additional behavioral problems are likely to emerge when using shock collars (7, 40, 43).
- Shock can intensify the severity and level of aggression in dogs, increase a dog's propensity to bite, and decrease bite inhibition (13, 14, 16, 38, 39, 40, 43, 44). This means dogs subjected to shock will bite harder, not softer. The use of shock can elicit aggression and redirected aggression in dogs with no prior aggressive history (5, 7, 13, 16, 40).

- Recall and unwanted chasing are common reasons people use shock collars on dogs (1, 40). Scientific evidence shows that using e-collars to train dogs is not more effective than other training methods (1, 7, 13, 16, 40, 42, 44). Even in the hands of experienced trainers, remote shock collars are no more effective than reward-based methods for teaching recall, stopping chasing, or remedying off-leash behavior problems (1, 40, 42, 44).
- Shock collars are *not* recommended by reputable dog trainers, animal behaviorists, veterinarians, or professional organizations due to the high probability of misuse or abuse by users, unreliability of systems, poor handler control, inadequate training knowledge, mistimed shocks given to dogs, and inappropriate shock levels used on dogs (1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 13, 16, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43).

Unreliability of Remote Training

- Currently, there are no regulations or standards for manufacturers of remote training systems (13). E-collar manufacturers are solely profit-driven (13).
- Shock collars and remote systems routinely malfunction (8, 13, 40). Manufacturers are not under any regulatory obligation to report problems (13). Shock intensity and duration are often uncontrollable, and many collars do not incorporate safety cutout circuits (8, 13).
- E-collar manufacturers do not have to reveal the amount of voltage their systems apply, which not only varies among manufacturers but also among models from the same manufacturer (8, 13, 23, 25). This means that a setting of “4,” for instance, on one collar may not deliver the same voltage as “4” on a different model from the same manufacturer (8).
- Manuals marketed with e-collars often don’t provide enough information for the user (13, 25). Information on shock features and settings, where, when, and how to use them, along with training advice are ambiguous, contradictory, and frequently incorrect (8, 13).
- Operators of e-collars often don’t read manuals and/or ignore instructions in them (13, 25, 42). Moreover, remote training systems can be purchased used and so may come without manuals (25).
- GPS and shock functions are unreliable. Electronic systems, for both training and tracking, are negatively impacted by terrain, such as the presence of mountains, valleys, hills, tree cover, power lines, buildings, cell towers; weather conditions, including humidity, rain, wind, and fluctuations in temperature; and wi-fi (10, 30). Efficacy of remote training systems is based on “line of sight.” This means that the terrain must be flat and open with nothing between the transmitter and a dog’s collar (10, 30).
- It is not possible to determine the appropriate shock level for a particular dog (5, 7). Dogs respond to shock differently on any given day, which varies among dogs. A dog’s response to shock will vary depending on distractions, noise, time of day, weather, humidity and temperature; skin type and moisture, thickness of fur; mood and emotional state (sensitivity, arousal, frustration); energy level; pain threshold; e-collar characteristics and

variations among systems such as electrode size, beep warning, and voltage used; shock intensity, duration and frequency; differences in training advice among manuals; and differences in owner understanding of training approaches (5, 7, 8, 34, 37, 40).

- E-collars are falsely promoted as an easy fix to train dogs and resolve behavior issues (7, 33, 35, 36). Remote trainers are not magic wands. Dogs should be pre-trained with basic commands and reliable on leash and in close range before relying on remote systems (11).
- Although one system can program multiple dogs, the transmitter can only send an electric stimulation to one dog or collar at a time (29).
- Hounders often wear gloves while holding transmitters and are out in cold and wet weather, which makes handling transmitters cumbersome. There is considerable potential for hounders to press buttons by mistake, deliver mistimed and inappropriate shocks, and to shock the wrong dogs (8, 29, 42).
- E-collars and shock fail to prevent dogs from chasing animals or curb predatory behavior and aggression (17, 20, 26, 41).
- Hounds are mostly out of sight of hounders throughout most, if not all, of the hunt. They are often not even in close proximity to one another. They are in a constant state of motion and exhibit multiple behaviors at one time, which vary among individual dogs. E-collars are dependent upon the handler being able to deliver a shock to the dog as a behavior is performed. Since hounders cannot see the dogs and are trying to control multiple dogs on one transmitter, this timing is impossible.
- A licensed hounder can have an unlimited number of people join him/her, but only one has the transmitter. Therefore, multiple people can be running hounds while having no control over them.

Welfare of Hounds

- Hunting hounds generally are not family pets and are used specifically to attack and chase animals. They are mostly kenneled outside or chained 24/7 unless hounding. They are subjected to harsh treatment and training, including forced hunger, and are often discarded when the season is over.
- Not only can hounders abuse hounds by subjecting them to unnecessary and inappropriate shock while training them, but they can also expose hounds to repeated and/or continuous high levels of shock when they are frustrated, angry, or in a bad mood (7, 8, 15, 40).
- Shock causes an intense burning sensation. E-collars can cause physical burns, lesions, and skin and pressure necrosis (5, 7, 13, 23, 35)
- A dog's skin is much more sensitive to shock than human skin. The canine epidermis is 3-5 cells thick compared to a human's, which is 10-15 cells thick (40) A dog's skin thickness and sensitivity are unrelated to the thickness of his/her fur (40).

- Hounds are subjected to violence, not only while “training,” but also when hunting. They can be seriously injured and mutilated while attacking furbearers and large game (*Houndsman XP Checking in on Vermont*, Jan 29, 2024, HXP Podcast Network).
- Hunting hounds are a means to an end and used specifically for a hounder’s recreation and “thrill of the chase.”

Summary

- Hounding is not protected in the Vermont constitution.
- Hounding is a form of animal fighting.
- Hounding is a recreational activity motivated by the hounder’s “thrill of the chase.” It is not rooted in conservation, nor should it be considered “hazing” because it cannot be controlled.
- Hounders knowingly release packs of hounds they have no control over to chase and attack wild animals. This is unfair to Vermonters and puts people and companion, and farmed animals at risk of injury from hound attacks.
- Hounders do not control their dogs, as the target animals determine where and in what direction hounds go.
- Remote training systems will not prevent hounds from running on private property and attacking people, companion, domestic, and farmed animals.
- Hunting hounds already wear remote shock collars. Vermonters and domestic animals have been attacked by hounds wearing GPS and remote e-collars.
- Points off a hunting license are not an effective means of controlling hounds, nor a reasonable consequence for hounders purposefully releasing packs of unleashed hounds to run on private property and potentially attack people, companion, farmed, and non-target animals.

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