

September 3, 2020

Attn: Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality  
Re: Prohibition of electric surge equipment (shock collars) on dogs

We are delighted the Dutch government is proposing a ban of electric shock collars used for training pets, police and military dogs. It is an ethical move that will help not only animals but also the people who love them and society at large.

Your government will undoubtedly receive a plethora of academic papers and position statements from world-renowned experts and all the scientific studies and literature you could possibly consume. We thought you might find it helpful to hear the perspective of life long (40+years) pet guardians. We believe we are representative of the vast majority of pet and non-pet owners in Canada, the USA and the UK as shown by the results of The UK Kennel Club's 2014 survey and our own Canadian and US Survey Monkey polls done in 2017. (1) Several countries have already restricted or banned electric training collars; Wales, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Germany and some states in Australia, while others have active movements anxious to follow. (2)

We are the pet guardians who created the website BanShockCollars.ca in 2007 to inform the public of the risks, dangers and cruelty of using electric shock collars to train their pets. Our website includes studies published in scientific journals, news articles, policy statements of world class organizations, credentialed animal experts and anecdotal evidence of the harm shock collars can cause. (3) Our opposition originally arose from the instinctual feeling that, 'what would hurt me would hurt them'. It was gratifying to learn there is an extensive body of scientific research and literature on animal consciousness (4), learning theory, animal behaviour and assessments of positive reward based training versus shock collar training validating our position. (5) We continue to watch as the science and evidence continues to pile up affirming shock training is damaging to an animal's physical, psychological and emotional well being while breaking down, if not destroying, the bond between guardian and dog. (6) Our position on pet training is, "When convenience and profit is not a factor and the best interest of an animal is the true focus, credible specialists in the field of animal welfare consistently affirm the most effective and humane methods for training are those that incorporate kindness, rewards and show respect for the animal."

Reputable vets, behaviourists and trainers who have worked with shocked dogs have witnessed the negative short and long term effects dogs suffer: phobias, irrational fears, depression, helplessness, and aggression. (7) Harsh training may look like it is working until it isn't. A simple push of a button and a novice pet owner can get an immediate reaction. However, this immediate reaction can be deadly for medically compromised or elderly dogs. It can even be fatal for the person applying the shock or for an innocent bystander if the dog decides he's had enough. (8) This is not hyperbole. The following is a warning buried in the instruction manual of a

brand name shock collar, that most people don't read. It is similar to warnings in other shock collar manuals. *Warning: "Do not use this product if your dog is aggressive, or if your dog is prone to aggressive behaviour. Aggressive dogs can cause severe injury and even death to their owner and others. If you are unsure whether this product is appropriate for your dog, please consult your veterinarian or a certified trainer."* (9)

Animals feel pain, terror, and happiness, have a sense of humour, enjoy good food and love to play. They want to live in peace. Just like us. Overpowering, forcing and intimidating dogs to make them do what is often contrary to their nature can cause chronic anxiety. Living with fear and anxiety can have a negative effect on their health and lifespan. (10) It's no surprise their feelings of safety and trust are eroded when the person they are dependent on does things that leaves them shivering in fear, panting, cowering and panicked to escape. Shocked dogs can suffer from PTSD. (11) Trauma isn't exclusive to war experiences, gunshots and explosions. Harsh training, intentional or unintentional abuse, affect the brain causing a decrease in mood regulating chemicals while increasing the stress hormone, cortisol. In a 2004 study police, guard and pet dogs, endured various forms of brutal training but it was the shocked dogs that showed the most significant stress compared to the non-shocked dogs. The study indicated dogs associated the shocks with the location and the trainer who shocked them. (12) Obviously, this would be a worrisome side effect for police and military dog handlers who need to rely on their dogs in high stress and dangerous situations. That single finding alone should be enough reason for police and military to want to terminate shock training.

Shock collar use is entrenched in police and military dog training in many countries. It is not unheard of for police dog handlers who use force and painful collars to be bitten by their dogs or have their dogs experience bouts of unexpected anxiety and attack innocent bystanders. (13 A,B,C) The cost to settle police dog bite claims is considerable. Dogs trained to attack are more likely to attack even when not cued. These dogs are less inhibited and their training rewards them to behave this way. Therefore, overall they are more impulsive and more dangerous than other dogs. (14) Although this brutal training is hidden behind closed doors, we the public are more aware and I can tell you it does nothing to foster good will or trust. Empathy is a pivotal quality needed to fulfill the role of police officer especially when attending to different species or people who don't look like them. (15) How can the public trust that someone who shocks an animal causing it to yelp, cower and urinate in fear is fit for a job that requires them to serve and protect? Punishment based training reinforces aggressive behaviour not only in dogs but also in the punishers. Punishment can easily escalate and devolve into abuse. (16) Dogs who can't handle the brutal training shut down or try to defend themselves. As a result they are labeled unsuitable for the job when in reality they just couldn't take the abuse. Teaching human beings with violence is not acceptable. Therefore, by extension, it should not be tolerated for teaching any sentient being. Captain was an ex police dog from Vancouver B.C. who didn't do well

in training and ended up with a civilian owner who repeatedly ill treated him until finally he beat him to death. (17) Dogs can learn to live with pain and discomfort but for any 'body' there is a limit. Yet, some police canine handlers continue to insist, shock and other aversive training is necessary to produce effective and reliable dogs. This misjudgment can have devastating consequences.

Although all sentient beings have different learning styles, we all learn best with positive reinforcement, praise and rewards. Punishment discourages engagement, inhibits learning, and causes cognitive confusion, pain and suffering. Enough data & evidence exists to prove that working, hunting, military and police dogs not only excel with positive methods and rewards; handlers don't have to worry about misdirected aggression. (18) Fearful dogs are unpredictable and often develop phobias and aggression. (19) The proof that highly effective and reliable dogs can be trained for military and police is demonstrated by the ACPO that do not use aversive, pinch or electric shock collars. (20) Another study, analyzing training methods of military dog suggests handlers should set a new training system to train with more positive training methods. (21) At a police/ military K-9 demonstration in Allenhurst New Jersey, the bond dog and handlers showed was admirable. What the crowd saw was not a lot of yanks and pulls, orders and stiff robotic dogs but officers and their partner dogs using positive reinforcement, fun and toys in their training programs. (22)

Pet guardians go to great lengths to protect their animals from all kinds of harm; toxic food, dangerous toys and inferior care but are often bluffed into believing shock collars will keep their dogs safe. Shock trainers claim these collars are invaluable for saving wildlife, stopping animal attacks, 'curing' aggression and for reliable recall. These claims are unsupported. These justifications are common talking points among shock fans. A 100% reliable recall cannot be guaranteed by anyone. However, positive reinforcement training has shown to be the most effective and successful technique for training a reliable recall. (23) Another unsupported claim is that shock collars are necessary to rehabilitate aggressive dogs. As previously noted, shocks have been shown to cause aggression not 'cure' it, even in dogs who have no history of aggression. A dog who is aggressive has experienced aggression. Violence begets violence. (24)

It is why legislation is necessary. The fallout from shock collars, as well as prong and choke collars can be great and the concern for any legislative body is to recognize this can become a safety issue for the public and a liability for any jurisdiction that sanctions them. This critical point needs emphasizing. Shock collars do not physically restrain nor deter a motivated dog. Educating pet owners is critical and one of the quickest ways to educate and influence a population is through widely publicized legislation. As long as these devices remain legal there is no shortage of day cares, board & trains, kennels and even grooming facilities that will use them without an owner's permission. (25 A,B,C) Their legal status gives them a seal of approval and credibility as a training tool. Legal for many folks is synonymous with safe, healthy, humane and ethical. Here are a few examples of

what's legal yet few can argue are harmless or ethical; cigarettes, junk food, pesticides, conversion therapy, trophy hunting, exotic animals as pets, solitary confinement, the death penalty, whips, bits, spurs, chains and the list goes on. The irony is, most of these things are unnecessary. And that is exactly how it is with shock collars. Shock collars are awful but lawful.

They exist not because there is a lack of proof they are cruel, risky and dangerous. They exist because we haven't cared enough to do something about it. When people in authority are ready to commit to betterment, change will happen. Until then, we can discuss, debate and argue while dogs bear the brunt of our impasse. We all know what is right. Now we need to do what is right.

We look forward to hearing good news and applaud your concern and deliberation on this matter.

Best regards,

Gwendy Williams  
Alfie Williams  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
Creators/Managers Ban Shock Collars .ca  
Advocates for pain-free training methods

#### Resources

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