

The Hows and Whys of Pet Containment

Early into the new millennium, awareness and acceptability of Hidden Fences or Invisible Fences¹ for pets continues to grow exponentially. What was once considered a pure luxury for homeowners now has become financially within reach of many consumers. The advent of this development has been fueled by the increasing number of households with pet ownership,² in addition to the high success record of professionally installed containment systems over the past several decades. Estimates of the pet containment market size vary but most authorities agree that annual electronic sales were in the 8-10 million dollar range in the early 90's compared to today's levels of over 175 million annually. In essence technology has become a friend of both the consumer and their pets.

Theory

The theory and application of all hard wired hidden electronic fences are the same.

A radio wave is transmitted through a wire (usually buried) in your yard to a computer receiver on your pet's collar that signals to your pet not to go into specific areas. The originator of this system was a gentleman named Richard Peck whose idea was purchased by the Invisible Fence Company. This was over 25 years ago and today several companies offer "Hidden Fence Containment Systems" that include professional installation and training as well as "do it your self kits". The differences to the ordinary consumer usually revolve around User and Pet Friendliness of the electronic systems, time and expertise of installation and most importantly *training*.

Technology

Over the years, technology has improved to offer more options for consumers and their pets. This has been influenced by the growing trend of owners catering more to their pets and treating them as family members. Great care and new engineering developments have made many of the electronic transformers and collars user friendly, as well as pet friendly. The most reliable and desirable electronic systems have been designed to maximize efficiency and safety. The computerized collars allow the user to easily change batteries and training settings on the collar's receiver, and the transformers have been carefully engineered so control settings are tamper proof. This child proofs the system and eliminates accidental changes to the signal field which would result in unnecessary stress for your pet and family. The required electronic components for your hidden fence are:



The electronic transmitter is usually installed in a weather protected area (garage or shed) that has a power supply. It can have adjustments for the radio signal width, training zones, and most importantly a wire break alarm . Some of the original hidden fence systems used analog electronic technology that has since yielded to more reliable digital and computer chip technology. Today, it is not unusual to find a hidden fence electronics package that offers a warning tone, vibration, progressive electronic correction, low battery light indicator, battery back up, surge protection, wire break alarm, separate training zones for flower beds or inside your home, and a hand held remote for basic obedience training.

¹ Invisible Fence is a trademark name of the Invisible Fence company
² Humane Society of U.S.- over 40% of American households own a dog

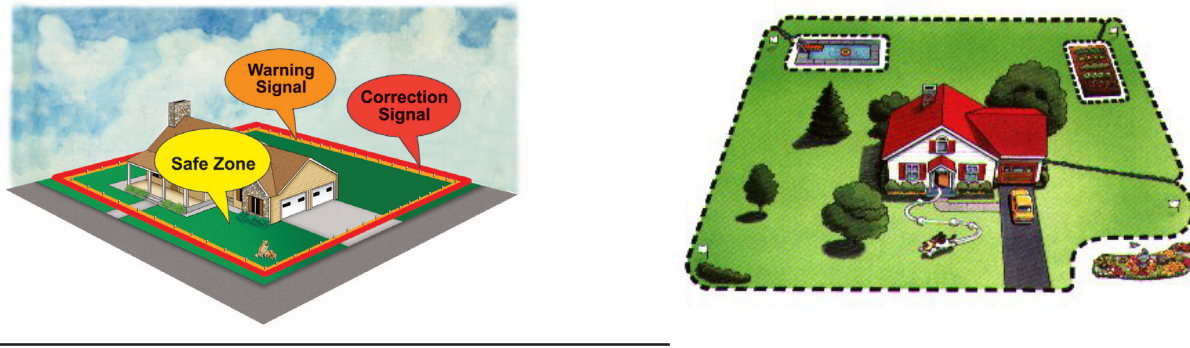
The computer collar can vary in size and features to include a vibration, tone and electronic correction. Probes attach to the computer receiver on the collar that sends a signal to your pet once they enter into the training zone. The hard wired systems should use a copper wire with a plastic jacket for mechanical protection during installation and lifetime use.

The reliability of the systems can vary; it is suggested you select a national brand supported by ongoing research and development, quality assurance programs (i.e. ISO 9000 approvals)³, and a company with a history of success selling diversified electronic pet products for over 15 years. In addition the company should offer lifetime warranties to protect your investment. In most cases the only cost you have once you have purchased your system is in the batteries required for use on your pet's collar.

Installation

Installation choices range from self-install to professional installation. Professional installation is usually available in most major markets. However, if you have some handyman experience, feel comfortable with electronics, and are committed to learning the electronic training criteria you may want to attempt a do- it- your- self kit. Often times, these same people call a professional installer to pick up the pieces as well as to relieve them of the training element of the process.

A professionally installed containment fence is one that utilizes a weather-protected area (garage, shed etc.) that has a power supply for the transmitter. The wire for the perimeter is often buried in the ground (most times using a specialized wire installation machine) or attached to another structure (usually a wooden fence). This is an interesting point, as some research shows that home owners with existing fences account for over 20% of the market due to their discovery that their pets have escaped (under, over, or through) their existing fencing. The main reason the wire is buried is to protect the system loop as well as to keeping people from accidentally coming into contact with it and breaking the circuit. Manual installation can be done using a shovel or lawn edger. Once a small trench has been made it is suggested that the wire is laid into the trench and secured with some type of carpet or sod staples. It is also important that you do not overlay the wire on to itself or make sharp angle turns as you can create a "blind spot" or area in the system that may not send a signal to the computer collar on your pet. This is one of the main drawbacks of self installations which can create a training nightmare should your dog learn about these areas. I also suggested that you call your local utility finders group who can locate your underground utilities. These include power, water, septic, computer cable, satellite or others that run to your home. Should you elect to try a self installed system, I highly recommend that you carefully read the manufacturers recommendations. Finally, I would suggest that you budget several additional hours as this project usually runs into unexpected obstacles. In addition, without any formal electronic pet training you will most always take much more time figuring out how to properly train your pet. Here in lies the hidden costs associated with self-installations. In many cases homeowners realize after the fact that they would have saved time and money having a professional do the job. See typical installations below:



³ ISO is the International Standards Organization

Training

As a trainer, and working with owners of electronic containment fences for years, I clearly feel that training is the most important element of your system. Dogs are not like computers, they don't come out of a box "configured" to accept and obey a hidden electronic fence. Some people feel that since they have been around dogs for many years that they can figure out how to do the training. My reaction to this is, all of us have grown up around cars but most don't have the faintest idea how to fix them. The big exception being that a car doesn't get fearful or emotionally stressed while your pet can take on undesirable behaviors, if they are not trained correctly. A skilled trainer can recognize indicators of stress your dog may be sending and can usually counter these behaviors minimizing stress to your family and your pet.

If you visualize an elephant outside the circus tent tethered with a chain or rope, you can easily wonder how such a small device can hold the elephant in place. The answer actually is that it can't, the fact is that the elephant has been conditioned to stay. This is exactly what is going to occur with your hidden fence. The key is to safely and humanely train your pet to respect the boundaries of your property. In general your pet will learn using a combination or one of the training components of your system. These typically include:

- Visual aids- (flags)
- Hearing cues (tones from the computer collar)
- Vibration (available on some collars)
- Correction (electronic stimulus from the collar)⁴

Some pets learn more quickly than others do but in general, the normal training period runs from a few weeks to a month or so before your pet is conditioned to the boundaries. It is during this time that a skilled trainer is invaluable, as numerous situations arise and the overwhelming majority of homeowners need advice on how to deal with these situations.

Consider selection of a babysitter for your children. Hopefully you have carefully evaluated this individual and are confident that they have the skill sets to deal with emergencies as well as the ability to effectively communicate. The same concept holds true for a trainer, especially one that will put an electronic collar on your pet's neck. I, for one, would want to know that this individual has had years of experience in training and specifically in the area of use of electronic collars. I would insist that this person have 1st hand experience preferably on their own pet and for minimum of 10 years so they have confidence in the collars and how they work.

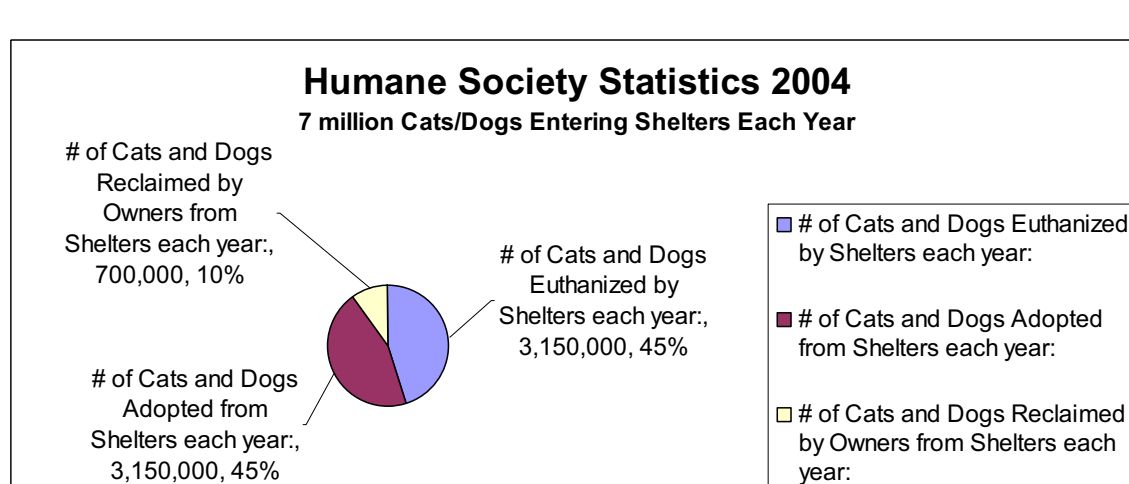
Conclusion

Pet safety and management are two of the biggest desires that owners have for their pets. Hidden electronic containment fences can make these desires a reality for the average pet owner. With the rising number of households owning pets, and the continued interest and success of electronic pet containment systems the industry will continue to grow. Unfortunately, pet ownership at times is fleeting, and many great animals become shelter inmates.⁵ I believe that the use of a containment system can actually reduce the number of dogs sent to shelters, making dogs and some cats more manageable for their owners.

As with any tool used in training, it must be used correctly in order to obtain the desired results. With the proper selection of an electronics package, error free installation and most importantly an experienced professional trainer, pets and their owners can enjoy an "enhanced quality of life."

⁴ Computer collars differ, it is suggested that great care is given to the selection of a safe, humane collar with numerous programming levels specifically tailored to the size and personality of your pet.

⁵ See HSUS Statistics on Shelter pets



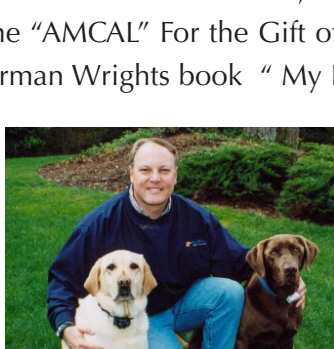
About the Author

Lance Baumann is the Director of Training for PetPro Training Systems, a Professional PetSafe dealer headquartered in Sammamish Washington. He was born in Oceanside, New York.

Lance holds a Bachelor of Science and MBA in Business Administration. His first dog to receive an American Kennel Association obedience training certificate was in 1979. Most recently Lance has been attending training and instructional seminars at the prestigious Triple Crown Training Academy in Austin, Texas. Lance is a professional member of the IACP (International Association of Canine Professionals), AKC (American Kennel Club), APDT (Association of Pet Dog Trainers) and the PSLRA (Puget Sound Labrador Retriever Association).

This past year, Lance helped develop the "Low Stress™" pet containment method authored by Professional trainer and Behavior Specialist Rich Weinsen. This method has been adopted by PetSafe™ the world's best selling containment system. Lance continues to refine this technique and is uniquely qualified to offer the most effective "Soft Touch™" training available in the Pacific Northwest for pet containment today.

At present, Lance is in Sammamish, Washington with his wife, and two daughters. This year both his Labradors are featured in the "AMCAL" For the Gift of Art annual Labrador Calendar painted by the world renowned artist, Jim Lamb and H. Norman Wrights book " My Dog Changed My Life, No bones About It."



PetPro Training Systems
Sammamish, Washington
(425) 868 3364
1-800-561-3647
www.PetProHQ.com
PetPro@comcast.net

⁶ Trademark pending
Copyright 2004, all rights reserved. Duplication permitted only with the express permission of the author.