

## Code of Practice for Training Dogs and Cats to Wear Electronic Collars

The Code of Practice for Training Dogs and Cats to Wear Electronic Collars (the Code) is made under the provisions of section 7 of Part 1 of the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986](#) (the Act).

The [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2019](#) (the Regulations) set out the legal requirements for the use of electronic collars on animals.

The purpose of this Code is to provide the specified code of practice as required under regulation 18(e) of the Regulations. The Code specifies the minimum standards required when training a dog or cat to the use of an electronic collar. The wellbeing of the animal must be the first priority in any training program and when using electronic collars on animals.

The standards in this Code are in addition to regulations relating to electronic collar use and do not provide an exemption to the need to comply with those regulations.

The Code and its provisions are to be observed by owners of dogs and cats and by other people who may work with a dog or cat being trained to the use of an electronic collar (such as veterinarians, qualified dog trainers and competent trainers).

Electronic remote training, anti-bark and containment collars are tools used by some trainers and owners to manage unacceptable behaviour or to teach obedience training. The Code sets out the principles that should be used when training a dog or cat to wear an electronic collar including the importance of enabling the animal to predict and control the stimulation.

The Code avoids detailed prescription of training programs as it recognises the wide variability in dog or cat temperament, behaviour and response to training and the need to enable the veterinarian or trainer overseeing the introduction and use of the collar to determine the appropriate training program after expert review of the animal and situation.

### Legal requirements for electronic collar use

The Regulations set out a number of requirements for the use of electronic collars on animals. Unless those conditions are met electronic collars cannot be used on animals in Victoria.

A summary of some of the requirements of the regulations are detailed below:

- Electronic collars can be used on dogs for remote training, anti-barking or containment purposes and on cats for containment purposes only — they cannot be used on any other species or on a dog or cat under 6 months of age.
- Before an electronic collar can be used on a dog or cat a veterinarian must first have assessed the physical and psychological health of the dog or cat and assessed the animal as suitable for the use of an electronic collar.
- Once veterinary approval is given for use of an electronic collar on a dog or cat the animal must be introduced to the use of the collar in accordance with this Code and the collar must be used under the supervision and written instructions of a veterinary practitioner, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer (dogs only).
- Use of remote training and anti-bark collars requires an ongoing review process by the veterinarian, qualified dog trainer or competent trainer within 6 months of first beginning use and then every 12 months after that first review.
- Collars must not be left on a dog or cat for more than 12 hours in any 24 hour period.

**If you are intending to use an electronic collar on an animal it is important that you are aware of the full conditions of use.**

If you have purchased an electronic collar in Victoria you will have been given information in writing about the regulatory requirements of use (this is required by law). Ensure you read this material as you need to be aware of your legal requirements.

Fact sheets are available which detail the legislation, refer to the 'references and further reading' section at the end of this Code for details.

Definitions

**I. electronic collar** means an animal collar that is designed to be capable of imparting an electric shock (stimulation) to an animal

**II. authorised electronic collar** means

1. in relation to a dog, any one of the following—
  - i. a remote training collar
  - ii. an anti-bark collar
  - iii. a containment collar
2. in relation to a cat, a containment collar.

**III. anti-bark collar** means an electronic collar designed to modify barking behaviour in dogs and is activated by a dog's bark

**IV. remote training collar** means an electronic collar that is designed to be worn by an animal to assist in the modification of the animal's behaviour and that is activated by a person through a transmitter

**V. containment collar** means an electronic collar that is designed to be worn by an animal as part of a containment system

**VI. containment system** means a method of containing animals to a specific area through the use of a boundary wire and transmitter that sends a radio signal to a receiver in a containment collar which then delivers an electric shock (stimulation) to an animal wearing the collar if it gets too close to the boundary wire

**VII. competent trainer** means a person who is employed by a company that sells containment systems and who is competent to conduct a containment system training program for dogs or cats that complies with this Code

**VIII. qualified dog trainer** means a person who meets the requirements of regulation 49(2) of the Domestic Animals Regulations 2015 and who is competent in the use of electronic collars on dogs

Note: Under the Domestic Animals Regulations 2015 a qualified dog trainer is a person who—

- (a) is a current member of an organisation approved by the Minister
- (b) has completed to the satisfaction of that organisation a training course approved by the Minister and administered by that organisation.

**IX. supervising person** means a veterinarian or competent trainer (dogs and cats) or a qualified dog trainer (dogs only)

**X. training supervision** means the planned oversight, by a veterinarian, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer, of the use of the electronic collar according to manufacturer's instructions, to ensure that animal wellbeing is preserved, that training outcomes are achieved and that ultimately the use of the electronic collar can be reduced or stopped completely

**XI. veterinarian or veterinary practitioner** means a registered veterinary practitioner under the Veterinary Practice Act 1997

**XII. veterinary behaviourist** means a registered veterinary practitioner with post graduate qualifications in animal behaviour.

Is an electronic collar the most appropriate option for the situation?

Electronic collars are used for managing behavioural problems as well as for obedience and off-lead training.

Before an electronic collar is used to address problem behaviour such as escape or barking, it is important that the cause of the problem is identified. Animal owners need to first seek advice from a veterinary practitioner, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer who will assess the behavioural problem and provide recommended treatment or training including, where necessary, a referral to a veterinary behaviourist before commencing use of an electronic collar.

Ensure the behaviour is not caused by the animal suffering from anxiety, loneliness, confusion, lack of exercise or boredom as the provision of exercise, enrichment, company (human or animal), removal of behaviour trigger or basic obedience training may be an adequate option for addressing the problem.

Once these factors have been considered, an assessment of the most appropriate training method is then necessary. If an electronic collar is recommended as the most appropriate means of training or of addressing the problem behaviour (as part of a detailed behavioural modification program) then the animal and owner/handler must be trained to the use of the collar in accordance with this Code.

Remember that a veterinarian must first be consulted to assess the dog or cat's physical and psychological health, ideally prior to the purchase of the collar.

If used incorrectly, there can be a number of potential risks involved in using electronic collars to train dogs or cats. These include:

- increasing the animal's fear or anxiety about the situation
- decreasing the animal's ability to learn
- associating other, coincidental events with a fear provoking event (such as, identify child walking past as cause of stimulation)
- not addressing the underlying cause of the problem behaviour so that it continues when the animal is not wearing the collar
- inducing a new avoidance or aggressive response
- causing confusion as to which behaviour is required and how to prevent electric stimulation
- causing pressure necrosis.

It is possible that electronic collars will have a negative effect on animals exhibiting some behavioural problems.

They are not recommended for use on dogs or cats:

- that are displaying aggressive behaviours
- expressing anxiety or phobia's such as separation anxiety or thunderstorm phobias.

They must not be used on:

- nursing or pregnant females
- dogs or cats with health issues, such as a heart condition
- animals incapable of responding appropriately (ie. old, invalid, distressed or injured animals).

## Supervision of training a dog or a cat to the use of an electronic collar

Veterinarians, competent trainers and qualified dog trainers supervising the training of a dog or cat to the use of an electronic collar, must have relevant experience in the use of electronic collars on dogs or cats. They must be competent to assess the animal's behaviour and to develop an appropriate training program that addresses the problem or unwanted behaviour.

It is the role of the supervising person to physically assess the animal, and its problem behaviour, in the presence of the owner (or person who will be responsible for the animal when it is wearing the collar) before recommending a training program. They must then provide written instructions to the person responsible for the animal and provide appropriate supervision depending on the person's ability and the animal involved. Note: supervision does not require the supervising person to be present at all times, it is up to the supervising person to decide the appropriate level of supervision.

There are many effective methods for training dogs and cats. A veterinarian, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer will be able to advise on the most appropriate method for the individual dog or cat. For any training method it is important to use short, consistent commands.

At all times, those undertaking the supervisory role in the training of an animal must ensure the wellbeing and welfare of the animal is the leading principle.

## Use of electronic collars

There are a number of considerations to take into account when training an animal to the use of an electronic collar.

### The importance of timing when using collars

Timing is very important when training animals using any method. The application of the electric stimulation as an aversive or consequence at any time other than during or immediately after the dog or cat has misbehaved or been given a command must be avoided as it will cause confusion for the animal. The only exception is where an avoidance training program is being used.

Timing is particularly important for dog handlers using radio controlled collars where the person has control of the stimulation and when it is applied. By comparison with anti-bark or containment collars the stimulation is automatic in response to the animal's behaviour (for example a bark or the approach of the animal to the boundary).

If the electronic collar is misused, for example by inappropriate or poorly timed stimulation, over a period of time the animal may develop anxious or aggressive behaviour or learned helplessness. Alternatively the animal may misunderstand which behaviour you are trying to change and instead will amend the behaviour it believes it is being punished for.

With containment collars it is important the animal understands the trigger for the stimulation so other distractions must be minimised when training the dog or cat to wear these collars.

If there is any negative behavioural changes when using an electronic collar use of the collar must cease immediately and further advice must be sought from a veterinary practitioner or qualified dog trainer.

Animals which are able to clearly associate the electric stimuli with their actions are able to predict and control the stressor and therefore are more likely to have a positive reaction to the electronic collar. They will also learn to avoid the stimulation by correctly changing their behaviour.

**The outcome of any training needs to enable the animal to recognise and predict the collar stimulation so the animal can act appropriately to avoid it.**

## Avoidance training

Electronic collars may be used in avoidance training methods, these training methods may also be referred to as escape or attention training. Using these methods the stimulation may be delivered to get the dog's attention or compliance with a command rather than in response to a particular behaviour. These methods must only be applied by qualified dog trainers, competent trainers or veterinary practitioners trained and competent in the use of these methods. The lowest level of stimulation that the dog responds to must be used.

The effect of an electronic collar can vary significantly

A dog or cat's response to an electronic collar differs depending on the individual animal. Therefore, it is important that when training an animal the collar is set to an appropriate stimulation level that will achieve the required behaviour change. In most cases it will not be necessary to use the highest level of stimulation in the first instance. The supervising veterinarian, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer will provide advice as to the best level to use when training an animal to wear an electronic collar and for any ongoing use.

Electronic collars must be used appropriately

Like all training aids, collars must be used without malice, emotion or anger. Incorrect use can cause tissue injury, physical lesions, physical pain and psychological damage to a dog or cat. In order to gain the desired response, the electronic collar must be used in a kind, calm and respectful manner.

Electronic collars must not be deliberately misused when worn by an animal

Always ensure the collar is fitted correctly but is not too tight as this can cause irritation or injury. If there is any sign of irritation to the neck of the animal from the electronic collar do not put the collar on the animal until the irritation has cleared or a registered veterinary practitioner has examined the dog and advised the collar can be worn.

If electronic collars are worn for prolonged periods pressure from the contacts can result in skin damage or pressure necrosis. It is for this reason that collars cannot be worn for more than 12 hours in any 24 hour period and owners have a responsibility to regularly check the neck of the animal to ensure that there is no evidence of pressure necrosis occurring.

Training dogs to the use of all types of electronic collars

To avoid having the dog associate the stimulus with the collar rather than the behaviour it may be useful to allow the dog to habituate to wearing the collar with the stimulus turned off for a period of up to two weeks.

**Note that the same legal requirements apply whether the collar is turned on or off and therefore the collar can still only be worn for a maximum of 12 hours in any 24 hour period.**

Dogs must be watched carefully when the activated collar is first put on the animal and when stimulation is first delivered or received; this is to ensure there is no unexpected and adverse response or reaction. Dogs differ in their responses and so must not be left unsupervised when first being trained to wear the collar and careful observation must be undertaken until appropriate behaviour is observed. This period will be at least one hour in duration, during which time several electronic stimulations may be applied, and until the dog is observed to react without confusion.

If an animal shows an extreme response to the stimulation, such as fear, anxiety, aggression or running away, or does not become accustomed to the collar it must be removed and further advice must be sought from the supervising veterinary practitioner, competent trainer or qualified dog trainer before continuing use. It is recommended that the dog is referred to a veterinarian for a further health assessment as the condition of the dog may require medication to be prescribed.

A leash must not be attached at any time to an electronic collar. If the dog requires a leash during training a flat collar or harness must be used in conjunction with the electronic collar. Ensure the dog is accustomed to being lead before using the electronic collar.

It is not recommended that dogs are tethered while wearing an electronic collar. However if it is necessary that a dog needs to be tethered while wearing an electronic collar it must be done in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Tethering of Animals. Dogs wearing containment collars must not be tethered while wearing the collar or when being trained to the use of the collar.

Additional training requirements for specific collar types

Remote collars

When training dogs using remote collars the stimulation must only be applied during or immediately after the unwanted behaviour or command. The stimulation must not be activated at any other time except if an avoidance training program (refer to earlier section) is being undertaken.

Where possible, introduce the dog to a remote training collar away from distractions and other animals.

Stimulation must only be applied where the dog is in clear sight of the operator so as to ensure the correction is applied at the correct time and only when the unwanted behaviour is occurring.

The trainer must be able to operate the transmitter without looking at it so as to ensure they can concentrate on the dog's behaviour and deliver the stimulation at the appropriate time.

Containment collars

When training the dog to use a containment collar minimise any distractions in the vicinity, where possible train in an area away from other animals and only train one dog at a time.

This is important as you do not want the animal to associate the stimulation with the wrong cause. For example, a child walking past at the same time it approaches the confinement wire may be associated with the stimulation, rather than the approach to the wire.

An audible warning signal must be activated so the dog is able to avoid the stimulation. They must also have enough space to be able to move away from the containment fence to avoid or stop the stimulation.

A visual barrier or physical reference must be used during training for containment systems or if the boundary wire is moved until the animal has learnt the new boundary.

It is strongly recommended that a physical barrier, such as a fence, is used in conjunction with the containment system, as well as assisting in containment this provides a visual reminder of the boundary. In addition, your local municipal council may not consider an electronic containment system adequate to meet the legal requirements for confinement to property. Owners are advised to check with their local council.

Containment collars do not prevent other animals from entering the property so where there is no physical barrier in place the safety of the contained dog may be compromised. Owners need to take action to provide protection for their animals from other animals (such as, a straying dog) entering the property.

Anti-bark collars

Dogs bark for a reason, and there are many ways that excessive barking can be managed.

It is important to identify the reason behind the excessive barking of a dog. By identifying the cause it is often possible to reduce or stop the excessive barking problem quite simply. Causes can include loneliness, boredom, fear, anxiety or illness, dogs may be trying to get some attention (even negative attention such as scolding may be preferred to no attention), to warn or alert you of something they see as a potential threat (i.e. postman, movement of people, animals or vehicles outside the property) or because they are cold, hungry or thirsty.

Simply giving a dog obedience training, more attention or some enrichment (such as, toys, walks), blocking its view of movement outside the property or allow it in the house (or at least in an area where it has regular contact with people) may solve the problem.

A veterinarian, veterinary behaviourist or qualified dog trainer can assist with identifying the problem and providing advice or training to reduce or stop the nuisance barking behaviour.

If an electronic anti-bark collar is being used the dog must be monitored when the collar is first put on to ensure the dog is recognising the cause of the stimulation and how to prevent it from occurring. If the collar is not successful in reducing barking or the dog does not recognise the cause of the stimulation then remove the collar and seek further advice from a veterinary behaviourist, veterinary practitioner or qualified dog trainer.

Training cats to the use of containment collars

Only collars made of stretchy material or with a quick release mechanism are to be used when training a cat to wear a containment collar, this is to ensure the cat can escape if the collar gets caught on something.

Cats must not be left unsupervised when being trained to wear the activated electronic collar to ensure there is no serious adverse response or reaction. Supervision is necessary until they show appropriate containment behaviour.

If an animal shows an extreme response to the stimulation, such as fear, anxiety, aggression or running away, or does not become accustomed to the collar it must be removed and further advice sought from a veterinary practitioner before continuing use.

If training involves putting a cat on a lead the cat must first be trained to wear a harness and walk on a lead before the electronic collar is put on and activated. Leads must not be attached to an electronic collar. If the cat requires a lead during training a flat collar or harness must be used in conjunction with the electronic collar.

Cats must not be tethered at any time including as part of an electronic collar training program. (This is in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Tethering of Animals).

Cats must be trained to recognise and predict the stimulation so the animal understands the reason for the stimulation and can act appropriately to avoid it.

When training the cat to the collar it is important to minimise any distractions. Train in an area away from other animals and only train one cat at a time.

A visual barrier must be used during training for containment systems or if the boundary wire is moved until the animal has learnt the new boundary.

It is strongly recommended that a physical barrier, such as a fence, is used in conjunction with the containment system, as well as assisting in containment this provides a visual reminder of the boundary. In addition, your local municipal council may not consider an electronic containment system adequate to meet the legal requirements for confinement to property. Owners are advised to check with their local Council.



Containment collars do not prevent other animals from entering the property so where there is no physical barrier in place the safety of the contained cat may be compromised. Owners need to take action to provide protection for their animals from other animals (i.e. a straying dog) which may enter the property.

#### Anti-bark and remote training collars

Use of electronic collars is regulated under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (POCTA) Regulations 2019. These regulations specify the types of collars that can be used and the conditions of use. If you are intending to use electronic collars you must ensure you are meeting the legal requirements.

- You must not use an electronic collar on an animal that is not a dog or cat.
- You can only use electronic collars on livestock as part of a scientific procedure approved under Part 3 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* (POCTA Act).

#### About anti-bark and remote training collars

An electronic collar is an animal collar that is designed to impart an electric shock to an animal. This does not include citronella collars where only a scented spray is emitted. The definition also does not apply to GPS dog and cat tracking/location collars that do not impart an electric shock.

- An anti-bark collar means an electronic collar designed to modify barking behaviour in dogs, and that is activated by a dog's bark.
- A remote training collar means an electronic collar that is designed to be worn by a dog to assist in modification of the animal's behaviour, and that is activated by a person through a transmitter.

#### Authorised electronic collars

Technical standards for authorised electronic collars are approved under the POCTA Regulations 2019. The current approvals mean you must only use collars that meet the standards set as Technical Requirements for Electronic Pet Training and Containment Collars by the Electronic Collar Manufacturer's Association. In Victoria electronic collars used on dogs and cats may emit an automatic audible emission, or vibratory warning signal, prior to delivery of the impending electronic stimulus.

#### Using anti-bark and remote training collars

You must not use a remote training collar or anti-bark collar on a dog unless you are:

- a veterinary practitioner or a qualified dog trainer or
- acting under the supervision and written instructions of a veterinary practitioner or a qualified dog trainer.

Under the POCTA Regulations 2019, a 'qualified dog trainer' is defined as a person holding a qualification obtained on satisfactory completion of a course that meets the prescribed requirements for a dog obedience trainer assessment program under Regulation 5G of the Domestic Animals Regulations 2015, or a qualification obtained on completion of the National Dog Trainers Federation Certificate III in Dog Behaviour and Training course.

If you are acting under the supervision and written instructions of a veterinary practitioner or a qualified dog trainer, those supervisors must review the use of the collar:

- within 6 months of the initial physical health and temperament examination of the dog, (i.e. the assessment that was done to confirm the suitability of using an electronic collar on the animal, as required to comply with the Victorian Code of Practice for Training Dogs and Cats to Wear Electronic Collars, made under the POCTA Act, and



- at least every 12 months after the first review.

Other conditions of use

You must not use an anti-bark or remote training collar on a dog unless:

- a veterinary practitioner has examined the physical health and temperament of the dog and reasonably believes that the dog is suitable to have an authorised electronic collar used on it, and
- the dog is over 6 months of age, and
- a collar is not left on the dog for more than 12 hours in any 24-hour period, and
- the use is in accordance with any instructions for use of the collar provided by the manufacturer, and
- the dog is introduced to the use of the collar in accordance with a training program that complies with the Code of Practice for Training Dogs and Cats to Wear Electronic Collars, made under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.