

## Positive Effects of Tethering by Nancy Russell\*

Those who show dogs or have them as house pets tend to think that only a kennel or fenced yard is a suitable way to confine a dog. The animal rights people claim that tethering a dog is cruel and promotes aggressive behavior. They find a few cases where dogs are inappropriately chained, and have bitten then use this as a reason to ban tethering of all dogs. Despite claims that tethering of dogs leads to increased levels of aggression, Dr. Houpt's team of researchers at Cornell University found otherwise. Dr. Houpt, the James Law Professor of Animal Behavior in the Department of Clinical Sciences, College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, is the world's leading expert on tethering and aggression in dogs. She and fellow researchers published their study, "A Comparison of Tethering and Pen Confinement of Dogs," in the Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science. The study concluded that the tethering of dogs is a safe and humane means of confinement. Experienced mushers, veterinarians and other medical professional that are dog mushers recognize this and use tethering as the preferred method of confinement. Over the past 14 years I have become an advocate of tethering and now my dogs are housed on chains.

For 25 years I raised Alaskan Malamutes for conformation shows and weight pulling, but I wanted to find out if the show dogs I had bred for so many generations could go back and work and survive in their native environment. Jamie Nelson, a professional musher and friend, agreed to take this challenge. However she insisted the dogs live like sled dogs; on chains. During the 4 years of training for the Iditarod race the dogs lived in Jamie's dog yard. One at a time they would come to my kennel to be shown. I noticed that the muscle tone on these dogs living on a chain was much better than my dogs that were kenneled and roadworked. Even during the summer when it was too hot for them to be worked in harness they maintained good muscle tone by pulling against the chain as they circled their area. Most of these dogs lived 2 years longer than my dogs housed in kennels and they had better hip ratings.

However, the most important reason for housing sled dogs on chains is they learn how to keep from getting tangled and how to get out of a tangle if they get in one. This is vital to them if they should become tangled when running in a team. A dog that panics and pulls and fights against the lines is likely to be injured. Dogs that live on chains become so adept that they will keep going on 3 legs, raising the tangled leg so the line will slide off. I have even seen them flip on their back when more than one leg is tangled to let the lines slip off the legs and then jump back up clear of the lines and keep on going. The whole process taking less time than it took you to read this.

Another advantage to housing dogs on chains is it eliminates fence fighting and promotes play behavior between the dogs. I didn't really believe Jamie when she told me this but now I agree. For several years now our dogs have been tethered when we are at our place in CO and when we are at the kennel in WI they are in chainlink runs. About 3 days after they are back in the kennel runs the fence fighting starts. When back on their chains the aggressive behavior turns to play interaction.

In addition to the advantages tethering has for sled dogs it is also a safer means of housing dogs in areas that get heavy snowfalls. Having snow get so deep the dogs can walk out of their kennel fencing is a concern of all dog owners living in those areas.

And for other specific situations tethering can have positive effects. I have used tethering as a tool to overcome shy or fear behaviors with amazing success. One example: I acquired a male, just over a year old, that had not been socialized. He had basically lived in a fenced yard and saw no one but the owner and another dog. He backed away or hid from strange noises, new objects, fast movement and all people he did not know. I did the usual things like basic obedience, taking him to conformation classes and to shopping centers. I biked him on the road, stopping at different houses, and anywhere kids were playing. He showed some improvement but not enough to even consider showing him. Then Jamie suggested I chain him out at the entrance to our place. She said living behind a kennel fence he was able to move away from anyone coming to the fence. The fence was his security. So I tried it. We had lots of traffic at our house because of the dogs and the zoo animals so people were walking past him, then into his area and finally up to him and he had no place to hide. Usually when he backed off the people just went on to the other dogs. Within a week I could see a difference in his behavior. He was showing interest in strangers. In a month he was a new dog, greeting everyone that came. The other insecurities to noise and strange objects diminished as his confidence grew. He was ready to show. He became a Champion and a Best in Specialty Winner.

I hope the information provided will encourage you to vote against any law banning tethering.

\*My credentials:

Humane Officer for 25 years for the Village of Sussex and Town of Lisbon, Wis.

Board of Directors for local Humane Society, Waukesha, Wis.

Breeder of more than 200 AKC Champion Alaskan Malamutes

Owner of the only AKC registered team of Malamutes to run in the Iditarod Race

AKC judge of Working Breeds