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December 28, 2009

Ms. Linda Hart
Secretary & State Legislative Liaison
Colorado Federation of Dog Clubs

Dear Ms. Hart;

Thank you so very much for allowing us the opportunity to present some discussion points and thoughts concerning the current state of practice of tethering dogs in working sledding kennels. This is a topic that affects many of our club members and mushers across the state. Currently, PACFA recognizes tethering as an acceptable method for confining sled dogs, and our members feel strongly that tethering is a valid, humane confinement option and should remain a choice for sled dog kennels in the state of Colorado.

If tethering is done properly, and there are a number of organizations, including Mush with PRIDE (Providing Responsible Information on a Dog's Environment) (www.mushwithpride.org) that provide guidelines on proper tethering and dog yard management techniques, tethering is actually a very healthy option (both mentally and physically) for managing a sled dog kennel. I would encourage you and the PACFA representatives to review the sled dog care guidelines available as a free download from the Mush with PRIDE. As a summary, here are some points that our club members would like you to consider when discussing tethering, as far as sled dog kennels are concerned.

- With tethering, the dogs have a greater space to move. A tether system with a 6' chain allows a dog's play area to be 113 square feet. With a 8' x 10' kennel, the play area is only 80 square feet.
- Tethering allows dogs to interact with each other and engage in species-specific behaviors without tangling, fighting, or unwanted breeding, and have private space where they can relax and not be stressed.
- Tethering allows the musher a greater ability to interact with and monitor the dogs to determine if they are eating, drinking, and eliminating appropriately. If one dog becomes ill, tethering can not only allow someone to monitor that specific dog, but it also prevents other dogs from coming into contact with potentially contaminated feces to help prevent disease from spreading.
- Sled dogs are not tethered 24/7, they get much of their exercise during their training regime, and most mushers also have exercise pens for play and interaction during the off-season months. Even dogs that spend their day "loose" in a back yard spend much of it sleeping, rather than just running laps because they are not tethered.
- Many sled dogs are mentally happier on a tether system than in a kennel; they don't have a visual barrier, and can establish their own "territory" within their tether circles. Additionally, many dogs can dig under or climb over a fence. Many dogs can get hurt, hung, or injured in the process of escaping a fence.

- Many properties, particularly where mushers live, are not conducive to fencing due to topography, shallow bedrock, deep snow conditions, or are in areas where fencing is not allowed due to HOA rules, wildlife corridors, or other reasons.
- For sled dogs, tethering allows a dog to learn to be line-wise and to avoid tangles. This is a very important skill for sled dogs to learn, and it is healthier for them to learn it on a tether system than in a team where the force of the other dogs could cause a tangled line to injure a dog.
- For almost all mushers (regardless of what their kennel set-up is like), tethering is the primary confinement system used when traveling to training areas, race sites, or away from the kennel. Typically shorter "drop chains" are used alongside the dog trucks to allow dogs to stretch, move, and interact in a controlled fashion.
- Some people like to claim that tethering leads to dog aggression. There is no actual scientific evidence proving that tethering leads to aggression, but that there is solid science showing no significant difference in the behavior of dogs (especially sled dogs) confined by tethers versus those confined in pens. The only scientific, controlled study comparing the behavior of tethered dogs (specifically sled dogs) versus dogs confined in pens was conducted by Cornell University and the report released in the "Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science in 2001. The researcher's conclusion reads in part "Our findings provide no evidence that tethering was any more or less detrimental to dog welfare than being housed in pens (as recommended by the USDA)." [Yeon Seong C., Golden Glen, Sung Wailani, Erb Hollis N, Reynolds Arleigh J, Houpt Katherine; A Comparison of Tethering and Pen Confinement of Dogs; Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science 2001 4(4)257-270.]
- The behavioral problems cited by those seeking to prohibit tethering are not caused by the method of confinement; rather they are a result of long-term failures of the dog's owner: lack of socialization, lack of training, lack of exercise, and/or lack of mental stimulation.

In conclusion, dogs are individuals, and while some are well suited for life in a kennel or free-run yard, others are much more comfortable on a tether system. Many mushers have found that they need to use a variety of confinement systems in order to provide the best care and management for their individual dogs. Eliminating tethering as an option limits a mushers ability to find a suitable system for each individual dog.

The focus of kennel legislation and requirements should not be on tethering vs. kennels; rather it should be about **daily interactions with your animal, proper dog care, and good kennel management**. There are certainly poor dog care examples for dogs in kennels, cages, crates, or yards, and in those cases it is not the confinement method that is in question, rather the kennel management and treatment of the dogs in question (as it should be). Sled dogs are, more often than not, some of the best cared-for dogs around; they are not obese, neglected, unhappy animals in someone's back yard. Mushers rely on having healthy working dogs, and if tethering systems were creating health or emotional problems that would be counter-productive to their goals, they would not be used in sled dog kennels.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to express some of our club members concerns in this matter. We would be happy to answer any questions you or the committee may have regarding sled dogs and tethering as an option. We would also strongly suggest that PACFA consider using the Mush with PRIDE guidelines to help refine or update the tethering options for Colorado, as it is important (as with any confinement system) to implement the method properly.

Sincerely,

Colorado Mountain Mushers Board of Directors

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