

My Dog is Lost!

By Brenda Howard

No matter how careful you are, sometimes things can go terribly wrong. Dog's can be lost. But dogs can also be found.

Plan in advance for the security of your dog; plan your fencing to be strong and safe; plan on keeping your dog safe in your car by using a traveling crate or seat belt harness; plan for a means of recovering your dog if he goes missing. There are three primary ways to identify your dog in the hopes of being reunited should he disappear.

Collar Identification

The pros of using a collar/tag identification system are that it is easily seen by almost anyone. A clearly engraved collar ID should have your name, the dog's name and your phone number. Use your cell phone if it's the primary phone that is with you and available most often. The cons are that collars can be separated from the dog. If the collar ID is the only identification used it's like putting all your eggs into one fragile basket.

Tattoos

The positive attributes of tattooing are that if done well, it will be a permanent identification system for the life of your dog. Anyone will be able to read the tattoo if they check to find it. Tattoos should be placed on the abdomen or the inner thigh. Do not tattoo on the ear since an ear can (sadly) be amputated, therefore removing the identification. The cons to tattoos are that they can fade so badly that they can become unreadable. The choice of what to put on the tattoo should be a cell phone number if you feel confident that your cell phone is permanent. Do not use your address, driver's license number, or AKC/UKC registration numbers – these numbers will be very difficult for most people to trace back to you, the owner of the dog.

Microchip

A microchip is a very small information chip that is roughly the size of a grain of rice. The chip contains a unique number. Today, most chips are universal and can be read by any microchip scanner. The microchip must be registered to be an effective tool for finding your lost dog. There are several chip manufacturers on the market. The brands most often used are HomeAgain and Avid chips.

The HomeAgain chip is manufactured by Schering-Plough and there is a small yearly fee to register your chip on their data base. The Home Again system will send an alert via phone and email to vast network of veterinarians within a broad geographic area near your home to alert those entities to your pet's disappearance.

The Avid chip registration program, PETtrac®, currently charges a one-time fee for the life of your dog. PETtrac reunites you with your dog by using telephone contact with your phone number being the primary contact, then whoever you have listed as the secondary contact and so on.

The American Kennel Club (AKC) offers a registration program for any brand of chip. The ACK Companion Animal Recovery (CAR) Program currently charges a one-time fee. The CAR program is also a telephone system using primary and secondary contacts.

The chip is inserted with a needle between the shoulder blades of your dog. The majority of dogs feel little or no discomfort from the injection. Most dogs do not bleed at the injection site, although it is possible. Today's chips are designed to stay put and not migrate away from the injection site. Dogs (and cats!) can be microchipped at any age.

You can purchase the microchip from your veterinarian or from an approved rescue group. Veterinarians, shelters, and boarding facilities typi-

cally have microchip scanners available for both "chipping" and scanning of dogs and cats.

Microchips are amazingly effective even if the chip is not registered. In the event of a non-registered chip, the owner can notify the company like HomeAgain of the loss of a dog. HomeAgain will then contact the facility that purchased the chip to notify them of the lost dog. The entity that actually performed the injection of the chip should keep a record of the owner and the chip number and can then assist in the recovery of the lost dog.

I believe that the best insurance for the possible return of your lost dog is through microchipping and the use of a collar/ID system. If your dog climbs fences however you may not want to use a collar for fear that the dog will get his collar hung while climbing which could be lethal to the dog.

What To Do If You Lose Your Dog

If your dog is lost immediately scan your neighborhood by foot and car. A dog that loves to go for car rides may just hop out of the bushes when he sees the car for the chance at a ride!

Notify your neighbors that your dog is missing.

Create signs to place at major intersections, in local vet offices and shelters. Most vet offices will allow you to post the notice on their bulletin board. Talk with the office manager and let him/her know about your dog and your concern. Use big bold type in creating the sign. Provide a general description but not specifics. An example would be "LOST – Brown Labrador – June 30, 2008 near hwy 380 – call 940-683-0000." Make the word "lost" as large and bold as possible. The rest of the information can be smaller, but should be clearly legible.

Contact the microchip registry if your dog is microchipped and registered.

Place an ad in your local paper regarding your lost dog. It may help to offer a reward. The good Samaritans of the world won't want or ask for a reward, and will be glad to return your dog to you if they find it. Check the lost and found section of the local paper for "found" dogs.

Contact local shelters regarding your lost dog. Most shelters want you to be reunited with your dog if only they know who you are!

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, and The American Boarding Kennels Association.

The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Please consult your veterinarian regarding all issues relating to your dog's health.

