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JAN-FEB 09

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THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

# The End of the Chain?

More communities are opting for dog chaining laws, but old habits die hard

BY JAMES HETTINGER

**W**hen it comes to recognizing the dangers posed by persistent dog chaining, some people get it, and some don't.

Making her rounds in the nation's capital, officer Ann Russell of the Washington Humane Society (WHS) has encountered both types.

It's a muggy Tuesday in August as Russell approaches the small backyard of a single-family home in southeast D.C. On a wooden deck off the home's second story, she sees a dog tethered by a cable to the railing. The dog barks upon first spotting Russell, then pees nervously when the officer gets closer. The deck is littered with dog poop, and the dog's water bowl has algae in it. Perhaps most alarmingly, the dog could slip off the deck and wind up hanging by her neck. (Each year, Russell says, about a half dozen chained dogs in D.C. strangle while tethered.) The home's occupants are nowhere in sight.

Russell walks to the front of the house and knocks on the door, which has a Keep Out sign posted on it. After a few minutes, a woman and a young girl appear. In a cordial-but-firm manner, Russell, who has visited this address before, explains the problems with the chained dog's living conditions, and promises to return the next day to see if they've been corrected.

Back in her truck, Russell, noting an earlier chaining incident involving a different dog at the same house, says the message isn't sinking in for this family. But today's situation wasn't extreme enough for her to seize the dog. District of Columbia law does not ban chaining outright, but it does say anyone who "cruelly chains" a dog may be subject to a fine of up to \$250 and/or a jail term of up to 180 days. The law considers a chain cruel if it exceeds one-eighth of the dog's body weight; causes the dog to choke; prevents the dog from getting adequate food, water, or shelter; is too short to allow the dog to move around or go to the bathroom in an area that's separate from the area where she eats, drinks, and lies down; is situated where it can become entangled; or prevents the dog from escaping harm. The provision leaves room for officers to decide which situations warrant a seizure and which may simply call for a little education.





CHAIN FREE AUSTIN

**In Austin, Texas, the prevalence of chained dogs—many of whom were tethered 24/7 and thus exposed to the state's notorious summer heat and thunderstorms—prompted citizens to push for a revised, more restrictive ordinance.**

Chaining persists for a variety of reasons. Some people simply can't afford a fence or an adequate pen. Beyond that, many people in D.C. have family roots in the South and cling to "old ideals" that include dog chaining, Russell says. Their attitude is, "I've been doing it forever, and it's never been an issue," or they protest that unchained dogs would run wild in the neighborhood.

Russell spends part of her time trying to educate residents about the potential dangers of chaining, including the possibilities that chained dogs will be attacked by other dogs or stolen. "If it's on that chain, it's just oh-so-much easier to grab," she notes. To reduce chaining and prevent dogs from roaming, she has helped D.C. residents fix fences or move cinder blocks in order to barricade holes.

She also urges people to report animal cruelty they see in their neighborhood. "Would you not report child abuse if you saw it? ... That's what I try to tell people."

There are "people in the community that fight our fight" by calling in incidents of cruel chaining, Russell says, but the day when all animal owners see it as a problem has not yet arrived.

Occasionally, Russell will suggest that someone build a dog pen, and—surprise!—they actually do it. "Those are the ones I love," Russell says. Such cases don't happen that often, but when they do she says, "This guy gets it."

### The Problems with Chaining

Most animal advocates agree that the problem is not the dog tied out for an hour or two while her owner works nearby in the yard, but rather those dogs subjected to continuous, around-the-clock, isolated chaining—a practice that clashes sharply with their social nature.

"What we know is that your dog wants to be with you more than anything in the world," says Dawn Ashby, the rescue and public liaison for Dogs Deserve Better, an anti-chaining group with representatives around the country. "... That's the No. 1 thing—that your dog's lonely on a chain."

"They're pack animals," agrees Karen Delise, director of research for the National Canine Research Council. "They were not meant to live solitary lives. And being chained out back is a very solitary life."

Continuously chained dogs tend to be neglected, exposed to extreme weather conditions, and confined to yards that are filled with debris that poses hazards, says Adam Goldfarb, an issues specialist for The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The owners frequently fail to provide proper food, water, and shelter.

When dogs are left chained for long periods, "There's often a lot of other issues going on," says Adam Parascandola, director of Oakland Animal Services in California. "Very rarely is it a beautiful, well-taken-care-of dog that's kept on a chain."

People who continuously chain their dogs are "taking the easy way out, as they see it," he adds, and essentially declining to be responsible pet owners. The dogs often don't get proper veterinary care and are confined to a small area that doubles as a bathroom. They tend to get worms and suffer from other internal and external parasites. Feces left on the ground attracts flies that chew on the dog's ears. The area where the dog can walk gets worn down to dirt, which becomes a mud puddle after a rain. Neglect leads to more neglect; if a chained dog becomes hyperactive, for example, the owner will be less likely to try to take him for a walk or spend significant amounts of time with him. "It's just a real hassle" in the eyes of the owner, Parascandola adds, "and so they end up just sort of leaving him on the chain."

Dogs are naturally territorial, and studies show that chained dogs are more likely to bite to defend perceived threats against their constrained turf, Goldfarb notes. A 1991 study of dog bites in Denver, for example, found that chained dogs are 2.8 times more likely to bite than

their unchained counterparts. The results of such attacks are often tragic and frequently involve children. "A chain does not stop a young child from wandering up on an unfamiliar dog," notes Lyndon Poole, a volunteer with the Texas citizens' group Chain Free Austin, "but a secure fence will."

Delise says she hasn't researched chaining, but it comes up repeatedly as she researches dog attacks. While she doesn't agree with the common statement that chaining makes a dog aggressive, Delise believes that chaining *invites* aggression because of a simple fact taught in high school biology: Dogs can either fight or flee. "A chained dog very quickly learns that he only has one option," she says. "There's no fleeing."

Toddlers are often the victims in fatal attacks involving chained dogs, she adds, because young children don't recognize the signs of aggression such as growling, and the "warning bites" that would land on an adult's thigh hit the child's head or face.

"The biggest thing is there is no way in the universe that a chained dog is given the opportunity to learn appropriate behaviors. He doesn't have daily interaction with humans," Delise says. "There's no way a chained dog has the same opportunity to behave appropriately like a dog that's maintained in a house."

### On the Radar Screen

Are we as a nation starting to understand that dogs belong with the family instead of out back on a chain? The signs of progress are undeniable, but so are the indicators that chaining is a firmly entrenched practice.

"I definitely think that people are much more aware of it than they were 10 or 15 years ago, and I think there is less tolerance for abuse of animals," says Terri Rutter, president and founder of Justice for Dogs in Frederick, Md., a citizens' group that recently lobbied successfully for a local chaining law. "... Public sentiment changes first, then you've got legislation that follows that."

More than 100 jurisdictions in 30-plus states have passed dog chaining laws, says Goldfarb. The HSUS, which supports ordinances that ban or restrict chaining and showcases sample laws from around the country at [humaneociety.org/chainingkit](http://humaneociety.org/chainingkit), has had more success in urban and suburban communities than in rural ones, and tends to do better on the coasts than it does in the Midwest, Goldfarb says. Typically passed by city or county governments, chaining ordinances have caught on in localities in some surprising places, he adds, including Georgia and Texas.

"It's definitely a hot issue right now," he says. "... A lot of people are getting a little more sensible, a little more compassionate about animals, so when they see the chained dog out there it sort of seems inherently wrong to them."

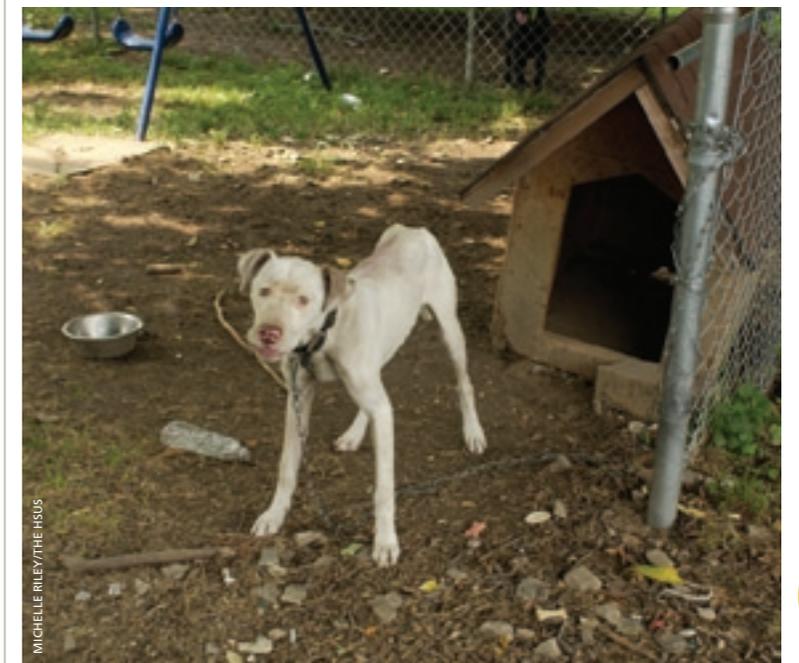
But just as surely, chaining continues in many areas due to a combination of tradition and economics.

New Mexico, for example, is a largely rural and relatively poor state where many properties don't have fences, notes Leslie King, community programs manager for Animal Protection of New Mexico Inc., a non-profit focusing on statewide animal issues. The lack of fencing, combined with local ordinances that prohibit dogs from running at large, means that residents who don't want to keep their dogs inside see chaining as the only other option.

"We try to encourage people to bring the dogs into their family, and improve that interaction with the dog and the family, but it is a problem here," King says. "We also see a lot of people here who like the image of a guard dog on a chain on their property."

The state has a patchwork of local laws regarding chaining, and King sees dog lovers increasingly calling her group or their local ACOs to complain about the practice. But change doesn't happen overnight. "It's a practice that's been done for generations," she says. "I think it's disappearing in a lot of places. It's just slow to go away."

**(Story continues, p. 36.)**



MICHELLE RILEY/THE HSUS

**Owners who persistently chain their dogs often neglect them in other ways as well, such as failing to provide proper nutrition.**

## Chain Reactions It takes a village to lobby for chaining laws

You've seen the suffering on the end of a chain in your own community—dogs left out in the summer sun or winter chill, pacing, growling, and barking in backyards strewn with trash. You can't stand it—but your local ordinance allows it, or maybe your jurisdiction has no law at all.

As an animal advocate hoping to make a difference, you decide to push for stronger legislation. But before you head down that road, be prepared: Do your homework, set realistic goals, build community support, and get ready to hobnob with local elected officials.

**Learn the issues.** "I think the most important thing is to do the research" to learn why dogs should not be chained, what kinds of laws exist in other jurisdictions, and what might work best in your community, says Adam Parascandola, director of Oakland Animal Services in California. "There's a lot of good information out there as to the harm that chaining causes, not just for the animals themselves, but also in terms of safety for the community."

And much of that information is just a few mouse clicks away. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) offers a free, step-by-step guide to passing a chaining ordinance—"A Dog's Life: Chaining and Your Community"—online at [humane-society.org/chainingkit](http://humane-society.org/chainingkit). Other websites offering anti-chaining information include [helping-animals.com](http://helping-animals.com), [dogsdeservebetter.org](http://dogsdeservebetter.org), and [unchainyourdog.org](http://unchainyourdog.org). Animal Protection of New Mexico has a chaining study, "The Public Safety and Humane Implications of Persistently Tethering Domestic Dogs," available for download at [apnm.org](http://apnm.org).

**Sweat the details.** A key issue for communities to consider is how extensive they want their chaining law to be. Ordinances that say no chaining is allowed

during a particular time of day—say, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.—are generally easier to enforce than those that merely limit the number of hours a dog may be chained. In a town with an eight-hour limit, for example, an officer might see a chained dog at 8 a.m. and again at 4 p.m., but unless the officer sits there all day to watch—or, in some communities, gets an affidavit signed by a witness—she won't be able to prove the dog spent the entire time chained.

Communities can also consider measures such as restricting the type and weight of the chain, requiring swivels to guard against tangling and protect the animal from injury, and specifying that the dog's area remain uncluttered by objects on which he could get caught and strangle, notes Leslie King, community programs manager for Animal Protection of New Mexico, Inc., a nonprofit addressing statewide animal issues. "The more details they can put into the ordinance, the better," she says.

In Orange County, Fla., for example, chaining is prohibited between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.—the time when the Florida heat is at its worst and children are most likely to run through yards, explains Wendy Myshrrall, the animal services department's program manager for field operations. The county also requires that chains used to tie animals be specifically designed for that purpose; citizens may not use logging chains or welding chains.

In Austin, Texas, advocates pushed for their new ordinance—which largely bans chaining—to have a minimum space requirement of 150 square feet per adult dog for any outdoor enclosure. That's still not a lot of space, but it's a starting point based on what exists in other jurisdictions, says Lyndon Poole, a volunteer with Chain Free Austin, a citizens' organization founded in 2006 to reform the previous ordinance. "You definitely don't

want dogs going from a chain to a tiny cage, so you really need a minimum space requirement in your law."

If chaining is going to be banned or restricted, it helps to have some affordable alternatives available. "You can't just go out there and say, 'Nobody can chain their dog. You have to put up fences' if nobody can afford to put up a fence," King cautions. "It's gonna be difficult to convince any lawmaker to impose that on people."

In Edgewood, N.M., for example, fixed-point chaining has been banned since December 2005, but a person can still tether his dog to a trolley system, which is similar to a clothes line with a runner and a pulley. "This gives them an alternative to a fence that's not working or a kennel that might be way too confining," and also allows a dog greater freedom of movement than chaining to a stationary object, says animal control program manager Victoria Murphy.

Before the town passed its fixed-point ban, Murphy checked out the availability and affordability of trolleys. She found them to be a reasonable alternative, since local feed stores and hardware stores sell kits for less than \$30.

The rural town didn't scrimp on the details in its ordinance: Trolley systems must be big enough and strong enough to restrain the particular dog; only one dog may be tethered to each run; and there must be a swivel on at least one end of the tether.

But Adam Goldfarb, an issues specialist for The HSUS, cautions against seeing a trolley system as a cure-all. "It can be a slight improvement for some dogs, but we're far more concerned with the isolation, the lack of socialization, being out there for too long," he says. "It doesn't solve the majority of the problems associated with chaining."

**Build a team.** "Network with everybody that you can, so that when you go to lobby for that ordinance you've got as much community support as possible," says Terri Rutter, founder and president of Justice for Dogs, a citizens' group that successfully pushed for a chaining law in Frederick County, Md.

That's the approach activists took in Austin, where a yearlong grassroots effort helped prompt the city council to pass the new chaining and tethering ordinance, which took effect Oct. 1, 2007. The previous ordinance allowed dogs to be chained to a fixed point for up to eight hours, but now chaining is allowed only in a few closely supervised situations, such as when the dog's guardian remains nearby.

While some volunteers distributed information to the public, others lobbied the city council and negotiated with city staff on the ordinance's language. Activists also consulted nearly a dozen communities around the country that had passed similar laws, Poole says, and that list of contacts helped reassure Austin officials. "The teamwork element and the coalition approach were just essential to getting [the ordinance] passed," he says.

"It's a good idea to look for allies on the local and state level," agrees King. Your coalition of interested parties should include everyone from animal control officers to community leaders, veterinarians, public safety officials, humane societies, senior citizens' groups and child safety advocates, and don't forget the local media and schools. King further recommends staying focused on solutions and refraining from burning bridges. "It's all about building coalitions, promoting a common vision, and cooperation, collaboration, education."

Rutter suggests trying to get ACOs on your team—even if it's an uncomfortable partnership—because the legislative body will

want input from them. In some communities, animal advocates don't have the best relationship with animal control officers, but, Rutter says, "You need to set that aside if you're going to lobby for an ordinance." Activists who want the best outcome for chained dogs should try to find common ground with animal control; not only will ACOs be helpful in lobbying, they'll likely be the main people enforcing the ordinance if it passes.

And in some communities, ACOs are the driving force behind getting a chaining ordinance passed, notes Goldfarb. In others, they're neutral about getting involved in the legislative process, opting to take the civil servant's stance of enforcing the law, whatever it may be. In either case, it's helpful to give the officers a seat at the table when a new law is being discussed.

"A lot of times the enforcement officers can be more concerned or more resentful if they're not involved early on, so I really encourage people to get them involved early, so they can help draft legislation," Goldfarb says. "They know what they can enforce, so it's good to get them involved on the ground floor."

**Master the game.** Activists should get to know their local lawmakers and work with them to understand the legislative process, Rutter says. The HSUS and other organizations can supply information about lobbying, she notes, such as how to give legislators an executive summary that won't overwhelm them.

It's also wise to be aware of potential opponents. "Try and learn as much as you can about your opposition, so that you're not blindsided when you are lobbying or you are testifying," Rutter says. "That's a hard one, because sometimes opposition comes out of the woodwork at the last minute, but the more you know ... the better presentation you can make."

To highlight the cruelty of chaining to people in the community, King recommends illustrating your presentations or printed materials with photographs of chained dogs. As you're making your case for chaining restrictions, emphasize the benefits for the community as well as the dogs. "If people don't care about the humane aspect," King says, "they may care about the public safety implications."

**Find your voice.** The lobbying process can be intimidating, especially if you're not accustomed to addressing crowds or buttonholing county commissioners, but Rutter has some simple advice: "Don't be afraid."

Rutter gets the jitters before she speaks in public—"I'm terrified every single time"—but says it gets easier the more you do it and the better acquainted you become with your local officials.

And she can always fall back on remembering why she's there: "Every time I get really scared, I just think about that dog that's chained, whose life I might make a difference in. And that gives me the courage to stand up and do my best."



Orange County, Fla., animal control officials have spread the word about Operation Unchain, the county's daytime chaining ban, through a variety of media, including this bus shelter advertisement.



DONA ANA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

**Yards strewn with dangerous debris—such as this one in Las Cruces, N.M.—are unfortunately a common habitat for chained dogs, who can strangle if they become entangled.**

### What's an ACO to do?

Animal control officers often encounter chained dogs, and many want to intervene. They can battle abusive chaining with a combination of education and enforcement, Parascandola says.

In Oakland, Parascandola's current jurisdiction, ACOs are backed by a specific law: California's health and safety code bans chaining dogs to a stationary object, with a few exceptions. Chaining is allowed, for instance, for up to three hours when a person is performing a temporary outdoor task such as gardening. When Parascandola started his previous job in Washington, D.C., he and his fellow WHS officers didn't have a chaining law, but they combated chaining using a ban on unnecessary suffering in the city's animal cruelty code.

"Regardless of what your law is, it's important to explain to people why chaining is wrong," he says. Even if you have an anti-chaining law on your side, you'll be more persuasive if you can suggest alternatives to chaining, such as putting a lip on a fence to prevent a dog from escaping. "That's really ... the best way to make changes. What I found was that ultimately when you gave people the information, the

people that really wanted their dog and were dedicated to it would do the work."

Humane officers can also combat chaining by keeping a referral list of helpful dog trainers, says Didi Clement, director of Humane Society University and a former ACO. "Of those dog caretakers who chained and were not intending to be abusive, I never met any who had heard of dog trainers who come to one's home to solve problems," Clement says. Many pet owners thought chaining was the only option for protecting their homes, since they had taken their puppies to "obedience school" but still had dogs who soiled the house and ate the window sills. But calling a dog trainer, she asserts, "was a boon and solved some problems."

While working in D.C., Parascandola discovered that chaining is "very contagious [in] either direction." If an officer allows a few households to chain their dogs, the entire block will follow. On the other hand, if an officer works with a couple of families to get their dogs off chains—possibly taking the more drastic measure of impounding animals at noncompliant homes—the rest of the neighborhood will fall in line.

Ultimately, Parascandola says, the officer needs to strike a balance between educating the community and enforcing the law. "If you're telling people, 'OK, I've been out here twice. If I come back again and you haven't done anything, the dog's still on a chain, I'm gonna remove him.' Well, if you say that, you have to come back and remove him. Eventually you have to bring that enforcement to show people that you're serious," he says. "... They'll weed themselves out after that, and you'll pretty quickly learn who's gonna comply and who's not. ... You get to the point where you can then drive around your area or your neighborhood, and you'll have a hard time finding dogs on chains."

### Hope and Despair

Educating the public about dog chaining can be a long, drawn-out process where the problems are stubborn and progress is gradual.

In Orange County, Fla., animal services officials say Operation Unchain is living up to its name. The public education campaign aims to make residents aware of the county's law, which since July 2005 has prohibited chaining between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. and placed restrictions on the type and length of restraints.

On a daily basis, animal control officers spread the word about the rules by placing hangers on doorknobs. The county also trumpets the ordinance via public service announcements and government-access TV shows.

When county officials visit schools, children are often surprised to learn that it's illegal to chain a dog during the heat of the day. "The kids don't know about that," says Vanessa Bouffard, a marketing and public relations coordinator for Orange County Animal Services, "and they're eventually gonna take that back home to their parents."

At other community gatherings, people often say, "Well, I chain my dog for protection," notes Kathleen Kennedy, another spokeswoman for the department. Officials call that a misconception and try to tell people that dogs offer more protection when they're kept inside, Kennedy says.

Is the initiative working?

By some measures, yes. "They are getting the message," says Wendy Myshrall, the agency's program manager for field operations, citing more compliance and a reduced number of citations. The county issued 175 chaining citations in 2006, but only 42 in 2007, which indicates that the education efforts and warning notices are making an impact, Myshrall says.

Still, she notes that chaining is prevalent in both the suburban and rural sections of Orange County, and for some people it's an accepted, longstanding practice in the diverse region.

Though Myshrall says that zero chaining would be the ideal situation, county officials opted against pushing for a total ban, recognizing the diverse attitudes in the community and some residents' desire to chain their dogs for short periods. "So we didn't want to totally eliminate it, but we did want to try to gear people toward not chaining their animal."

And Kennedy sees a change in the public attitude, however gradual; some people are starting to think about bringing their dogs into the home. "It's maybe not gonna go from a chained dog to sleeping in the bedroom, but what is a step forward?" she says. "So that's when we talk to them about the crate-training options, the fencing options, and things like that."

But the slow pace of change leaves some advocates frustrated.

"I'm more heartbroken now than ever," says Ashby. In April 2008 she and Dogs Deserve Better founder Tammy Grimes (who recently changed her name to Tamira Ci Thayne, which roughly translates to "Peaceful Dog Warrior") toured 12 Southeastern states in 12 days in search of chained dogs. Ashby says she expected some of what she saw: dogs who had no food or water and who never get taken off their chains.

But she was especially distressed that she and Grimes, driving around at random, also found several dogs with embedded collars—indicating the dogs had



CHAIN FREE AUSTIN

**Dogs who are persistently chained often wear down the lawn beneath them. The bare dirt can become mud puddles when it rains, making the environment even more uncomfortable.**

likely been neglected since they were young, and had been chained without veterinary attention for a long time. "It makes me think how many dogs are out there suffering with embedded collars, and people don't even know it," Ashby says. "If we can find them at random that way, it's just overwhelming."

But Ashby says she is optimistic about the future of the fight against chaining, at least most of the time. She sees many rescues, hears many "wonderful stories," and takes heart in knowing that Dogs Deserve Better, which has helped draw national attention to dog chaining, has 150 hard-working volunteer representatives.

"People really, really care about this cause, and we're really ready for it to end," she notes. "... People ... always tell me, 'Boy, you must really love dogs.' ... And I always tell them that I don't love dogs as much as I hate suffering. And these dogs on the end of the chain, they are suffering every day." AS