



ECMA Code of Practice

for the use of Electronic Collars on Dogs and Cats

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this Code is to specify the minimum standards required when using an electronic collar on dogs or cats.

The Code and its provisions are to be observed by all people who may use electronic collars on a dog or cat.

Exuberant and unbridled behaviour can expose dogs to potential harm and can bring them into conflict with human sensibilities. A dog's unacceptable behaviour can be managed either by physical restraint or through training. Training systems are an effective way of teaching a dog basic obedience commands. Training, containment and bark-control systems are subtle tools for trainers to manage unacceptable behaviour in dogs while maintaining their quality of life. It's not just the owner and dog that benefit from the dog's good behaviour, neighbours and other animals will benefit too.



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Electronic collars are only used on cats for containment purposes.

2. Legal requirements relating to the use of electronic collars

Currently there are no EU general animal welfare laws. However there are regulations which may have an impact on the use of electronic collars on animals in various EU jurisdictions. Examples for the UK are shown below. For a complete background please refer to **Appendix A**.

For example:

- The general welfare of dogs and cats is protected by Animal Welfare Laws (In the England and Wales this is the Animal Welfare Act 2006)
- The jurisdiction of Wales has specific regulations relating to Electronic Collars (In Wales this is Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars)(Wales) Regulation 2010)
- The UK has regulations relating to dog behaviour that electronic collars are designed to manage:
 - Nuisance barking (In the UK this is dealt with by the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Noise)
 - Dangerously out of control dogs in a public place (In the UK this is dealt with by Section 3(1) Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 & Section 2 Dogs Act 1871)
 - Soiling public spaces (In the UK Dog Control Orders can be applied as part of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.)
 - Worrying livestock (In the UK the Animals Act 1971 (section 9(1)) provides a defence to someone who is subject to civil proceedings for killing or injuring a dog that was worrying, or about to worry, livestock.

If you are intending to use or sell an electronic collar it is important that you are aware of the full conditions of use in your jurisdiction.

3. Definitions

- I. **Electronic collar:** an animal collar that is capable of imparting a static electronic stimulation to a dog or cat.
- II. **Authorised electronic collar:**
 - a. In relation to a dog, can mean any one of the following —

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- i. a remote training collar;
 - ii. a bark control collar;
 - iii. a containment collar
 - b. In relation to a cat, a containment collar.
- III. **Bark control collar:** an electronic collar designed to modify barking behaviour in dogs and is activated only by the bark of the dog wearing the collar.
- IV. **Remote training collar:** an electronic collar that is designed to assist in the modification of the animal's behaviour and that is activated by a person through a transmitter.
- V. **Containment collar:** an electronic collar that is worn by an animal as part of a containment system.
- VI. **Containment system:** a method of containing animals to a specific area through the use of a boundary wire or a wireless system.
- VII. **LIMA:** was introduced by S.R. Lindsay in 2001 and stands for "least intrusive, minimally aversive".
- VIII. **LIEBI:** was introduced by J. O'Heare in 2009 and stands for "least intrusive effective behavioural intervention".

4. Intensity of Electronic Stimulation

The user should consult the operating guide and establish the best training method for their dog but should always use the minimum intensity of stimulation necessary to achieve the training objective. This follows the LIMA and LIEBI algorithm

5. When to use and when not to use an Electronic Collar

Electronic collars can be used for:

- Basic obedience
- Off-lead control, especially recall.



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- Management of many behavioural problems, including chasing.
- Elderly, infirm or disabled owners who have difficulty controlling, communicating with and training their dog.
- Owners with strong or unruly dogs which are not easy to manage.

Electronic collars should not be used for:

- Dogs under 6 months of age.
- Pregnant or nursing bitches.
- Dogs with health problems particularly heart disease, unless e-collar use has been approved by a veterinary surgeon.
- Dogs that cannot respond appropriately due to injury, illness, senility or age.
- Dogs which respond with inappropriate aggression to aversive stimulation
- Management of behavioural problems which are caused by anxiety except by qualified dog trainer who are proficient at using electronic collars.

ECMA recommends that the health and wellness of dogs and cats is assured by annual veterinary examination.

6. Remote Training Protocols

All training and use of electronic collars must be done either in accordance with ECMA member's guidelines or under the close supervision of a qualified dog trainer.

In principle there are two training techniques using electronic collars:

a. Attention training uses low intensity electrical stimulation delivered to a dog until it gives the trainer its attention or to encourage compliance with a command. This is sometimes known as 'avoidance training'.

b. Inhibition training uses sufficiently high intensity electrical stimulation to interrupt or to inhibit a dog's undesirable behaviour.



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All ECMA members' protocols regarding the use electronic collars have common themes:

- Introduction of a dog to an electronic collar
- Determining the minimum recognition level
- Attention training
- Consolidating the reliability of training (longer duration, stronger distraction different places)
- Introducing a command (such as Heel)
- Starting basic obedience training (Recall, Stay, Stop etc.)
- Countering unacceptable behaviour using attention or inhibition training
- Weaning a dog off an electronic collar
- What to do when training is not working or problems are occurring

For more detail of ECMA member training protocols see each member's instruction guide or **Appendix B**.

7. Perceived electronic collar issues

A theoretical risk is occasionally cited that a dog may associate stimulation during training with a coincidental object or animal and if this occurred the dog could develop a fear of that thing. It is extremely unlikely that a dog would develop a misassociated fear of an object, person or animal following a single exposure to low or medium intensity stimulation and would only occur if the electronic collar was not used in accordance with these guidelines.

It has also been suggested that any training technique that uses an unpleasant stimulation increases the risk of eliciting aggressive behaviour from a dog. However recent research suggests that problem behaviours associated with training is more likely to arise as a result of inconsistency and inappropriate delivery of both unpleasant stimulation and reward. These are issues which need to be addressed by better informing and instructing trainers regardless of the training technique they employ.

8. Pressure necrosis

The dermal contacts of electronic collars must touch the dog's skin to transmit the electrical stimulation; therefore the collar must fit snugly. If electronic collars are worn by dogs for prolonged periods, pressure from the dermal contacts can reduce blood supply to the skin resulting in skin damage. This is known as 'pressure necrosis' which is caused by pressure, and not by the electrical stimulation. For this reason ECMA recommends that electronic collars are



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worn for short periods initially and that the times are gradually extended to the maximum period of 12 hours per day. Owners also have a responsibility to examine the dog's skin around the area of contact with the dermal contacts regularly to check that there is no evidence of pressure necrosis developing.

9. Containment systems

When training the dog to use a containment collar it is important to minimise any distractions. Train in an area away from other animals and only train one dog at a time. A 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 must be used during training for containment systems or if the boundary wire is moved until the animal has learnt the new boundary.

Some local authorities may not consider that an electronic containment system adequately meets the legal requirements for confinement to property. In these circumstances it is necessary to use a physical barrier, such as a fence, in conjunction with the containment system.

Remote training collars controlled by a trainer can be used to introduce containment systems reliably and safely. Accurate remote activation of stimulation by a trainer in a containment context can aid transition to a containment system which is behaviour activated.

It is not appropriate to attempt to wean a dog off a containment system.

10. Bark control systems

Unwanted barking can have many and various causes. When the reason for the barking is understood, the cause of the problem can sometimes be withdrawn so the unwanted barking stops without recourse to a bark control collar.

Monitor the dog to ensure it is recognising the cause of the stimulation. Some trainers use an electronic remote training system to introduce a bark control system. This allows the trainer to start stimulation at the lowest intensity and activate it appropriately in relation to barking. Accurate remote activation of stimulation by a trainer in a bark-control context can aid transition to a behaviour-activated system. 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 surgeon or qualified dog trainer on alternative options.



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It may be possible to wean a dog off a bark control system.

11. Cat Containment Systems

Cats must have receivers attached to breakaway type collars not ordinary or elasticated collars.

Cats must not be left unsupervised for the first 7 days of wearing the activated electronic collar. Cats must be watched carefully when the activated collar is first put on and stimulation is received to ensure that there is no serious adverse response or reaction.

If the cat shows an extreme response to the stimulation, such as fear, anxiety, aggression or running away, or it 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.

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

Remote training collars controlled by a trainer can be used to introduce containment systems reliably and safely. Accurate remote activation of stimulation by a trainer in a containment context can aid transition to a containment system which is behaviour activated.

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 cat has learnt the new boundary.

With cats it is strongly recommended that a physical barrier, such as a fence, is used in conjunction with the containment system. In addition, your local authority may not consider an electronic containment system alone adequately meets the legal requirements for confinement to property.

It is not appropriate to wean a cat off a containment system.



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12. References & Further information

Appendix A - Legal requirements relating to the use of electronic collars

European Union - Current legal framework

There is at present no specific EU legislation regulating the sale or use of e-collars from an animal welfare point of view. There is furthermore **no EU General Animal Welfare Law**.

In fact, the EU does neither have a *general* competence to legislate in the domain of animal welfare, nor any specific competence on pet animal welfare. Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) merely allows the EU to “*pay regard*” to the welfare requirements of animals when “*formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies*”. And when doing so, the Union must respect “*the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage*”.

Nevertheless, the **internal market rules** could potentially come to serve as a reason/justification for the EU to legislate in the domain of welfare for pet animals, since these animals could be considered traded goods. In the specific case of e-collars, such equipment could also theoretically come under EU regulation in case the Commission believes that different national bans or restrictions in place would give rise to a “*fragmentation of the functioning of the internal market*”. Similarly to the case on the recent EU Regulation banning trade in seal products (based on animal welfare concerns and justified by the national bans in Belgium and the Netherlands), such harmonisation could very well be of detriment to the manufacturers of e-collars – and that for the entire EU market. But this is not evident/straightforward and it is, in particular, conditional upon national restrictions being legal under EU law.

When it comes to national restrictions on goods (like e-collars), it should be kept in mind that the treaty rules on the free movement of goods within the EU prohibits as a general rule so called ‘quantitative restrictions on imports and exports and all measures having equivalent effect’ (Articles 34 and 35). Although Article 36 TFEU provides for derogations to these internal market freedoms, such derogations must be justified on the grounds described in Article 36, *inter alia* public morality, public policy or public security; the protection of health and life of



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humans, animals or plants /.../ or on the basis of overriding requirements of general public importance recognised by the case-law of the EU Court of Justice, and be proportionate to the aim pursued. It is doubtful that “health of animals” (rather referring to diseases) is the same as “welfare of animals”.

Future initiatives

However, steps are currently being taken towards an umbrella-law on animal welfare for the EU and it seems highly probable that **pet animal welfare** will be one of the issues covered.

In its recent [Own-Initiative Report on Evaluation and Assessment of the Animal Welfare Action plan 2006-2010](#), the European Parliament (EP) calls on the Commission to submit, no later than 2014 a proposal for general animal welfare legislation for the EU. The EP’s report feeds into the greater Evaluation of the EU Policy on Animal Welfare launched by the Commission in 2009 and aimed at establishing the EU’s priorities in this area beyond 2011. All categories of animals, including dogs, are up for discussion and all regulatory options are still on the table, including more legislation, research, communication, international activities – but also possible changes in the EU treaties.

As part of this Evaluation, the Commission launched an Online Survey in June 2010 on the EU policy regarding Animal Welfare. The [results](#) from the Survey have now been published and reveal that 55% of the respondents agreed that it is important for the EU to get involved in welfare policy for pet animals.

In November the same year, the Council of Ministers (representing the EU governments) adopted its [Council Conclusions on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats](#) calling on the Commission to take a number of initiatives regarding pet animal welfare.

The Survey results and the Council Conclusions on the Welfare of Dogs and Cats will most probably lead to the welfare of pets being addressed at EU level by the Commission in the coming years. Although not explicitly mentioned in these two initiatives, the sale and use of e-collars might come up for review in this connection.

The Commission, DG SANCO, is currently finalising its Impact Assessment on its future [Animal Welfare Strategy 2011-2015](#). Based on stakeholders’ and citizens’ consultations, including the Online Survey, the Commission foresees to be able to present its new Strategy in December later this year.

Council of Europe



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In 1 May 1992, the [European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals](#) entered into force. The Convention was drawn up within the [Council of Europe](#) – which should not be confused with the European Union - by the *ad hoc* Committee of experts for the protection of animals (CAHPA). The [Parties](#) meet regularly to examine the application of the Convention and, if appropriate, to extend or strengthen its provisions.

Article 3 (Basic principles for animal welfare) provides that *“nobody shall cause a pet animal unnecessary pain, suffering or distress”*.

According to its Article 7 (Training), *“no pet animal shall be trained in a way that is detrimental to its health and welfare, especially by forcing it to exceed its natural capacities or strength or by employing artificial aids which cause injury or unnecessary pain, suffering or distress.”*

The interpretation of these provisions, including for the use of e-collars, varies across the member States.

Appendix B - An Example of a Typical Remote Training Protocol

i) Introduction of a dog to an electronic collar

The electronic collar should fit snugly around the top of the neck just below the ears. The trainer should select contacts of the correct length to touch the skin through the dog’s coat. To facilitate this it helps to brush the dog’s coat close to the contact points.

Leads, long lines and tethers must be attached to a flat collar or harness, never to the electronic collar.

Initially, the trainer gets the dog used to wearing the inactive (switched off) electronic collar over a period of 1 to 2 weeks if time allows. The collar is put on and off the dog several times a day and associated with pleasant experiences (e.g. a walk, play, a treat or just before a meal). The collar must not be left on for more than 8 hours a day to start with, building to a maximum of 12 hours a day over a week. Dog owners have a responsibility to check their dog’s skin where the contacts touch for signs or irritation or inflammation regularly. Putting the electronic collar on and taking it off regularly reduces the chance of the dog becoming ‘collar-wise’. This helps prevent the dog from only following commands when it is wearing the collar.



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Early training must be in a safe environment with minimal distractions and using a flat collar (which sits lower on the neck than the electronic collar) or a harness, with a lead or a line attached. Lines can be dragged behind the dog on the ground or held. If necessary the trainer can step on the line to stop the dog. A line 7 meters long is ideal for most training but lines up to 25 meters are useful for recall.

The trainer must be able to operate the remote transmitter without having to look at it, so that they can concentrate on the dog's behaviour and ensure stimulation delivery is timely.

The dog can be familiar with the remote transmitter but must not associate it with stimulation; so the remote should never be pointed at the dog when activating stimulation. An observant dog may become 'remote-wise' and no longer follow commands without stimulation.

ii) Determining the minimum recognition level

Once the trainer is familiar with the operation of the remote transmitter and the dog has become accustomed to the electronic collar the trainer can move to the next step which is determining the correct stimulation intensity for the dog.

Once activated the trainer should check that the electronic collar and remote transmitter are working correctly. This is done by holding the electronic collar so that the contacts touch the palm of the hand. Starting at the lowest intensity, the stimulation button on the remote transmitter is pushed and the intensity increased until a mild tickle or a prickle is felt. If maximum intensity is reached without feeling any stimulation, the collar is not working correctly and reference should be made back to the operating guide.

After checking that the system is working, the trainer returns the collar to the lowest intensity and leaving it switched on puts the electronic collar on the dog in order to determine the minimum stimulation that the dog can recognise. This varies from dog to dog depending on their sensitivity to electrical stimulation. Without making any indication to the dog, the trainer presses the stimulation button for 1 to 2 seconds then releases it whilst watching for any reaction. The dog may give a little shake, turn its head, show a surprised expression, raise or lower their tail, raise or lower their ears, blink or look towards the collar or scratch at the collar with a hind foot. If there is no reaction, the intensity is increased by one graduation and the procedure repeated until the trainer notices them recognise electrical stimulation. This is the dog's minimum recognition level. This varies for each dog and may vary for individuals from one day to another and from one situation to another. For this reason the dog's minimum recognition level should be determined before each training session.



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iii) Attention training

Having determined the dog's minimum recognition level the next step is to teach attention training using the 'follow me' technique. This encourages the dog to pay attention to the trainer without any commands and teaches the dog how to avoid stimulation.

The trainer attaches a 7 metre line to the flat collar or harness and whilst walking away from the dog briefly presses the stimulation button set at the minimum recognition level. The trainer encourages the dog to follow him using gentle tension on the line and as soon as the dog starts to follow, stops the stimulation and rewards the dog as it comes along side. Dogs make associations between their behaviour and a pleasant experience or an unpleasant experience in less than one second so the timing of the start and the stop of the stimulation is very important.

The trainer changes direction and holds the stimulation button until the dog starts to follow. Dogs quickly learn to be attentive and will follow the trainer to avoid stimulation. The trainer encourages them and rewards with praise, affection, toys or treats. Training sessions need only last about 15 minutes but can be carried out several times a day. Until the dog is reliable the electronic collar should be worn on all occasions when the trainer may need to get and retain their attention.

The dog quickly learns how to avoid stimulation completely by anticipating what it has to do before stimulation is delivered. The dog rewards itself by correctly modifying its behaviour and avoiding the stimulation.

iv) Consolidating the reliability of training

Once the dog understands that paying attention when requested turns off the stimulation, the attention training should be consolidated. It is vital that training can be reliably reproduced for longer durations in different places with stronger distractions. This is known as generalisation or 'proofing reliability' and once achieved the trainer can start training other tasks.

v) Introducing a command

The 'follow me' technique is used to gain attention without giving commands. Follow me is similar to the 'heel' command so this is the easiest skill to teach next. Each ECMA manufacturer



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and professional trainer will have a preferred way of doing this and their advice should be sought and followed.

vi) Starting basic obedience training

As mentioned above, each ECMA manufacturer and professional trainer will have a preferred way of doing this and their advice should be followed. Whatever method is used it is important that the dog has some idea of what the trainer wants it to do before the active electronic collar is used. Following the introduction of the command 'heel' many trainers will teach recall next. Electronic collars are a useful tool to teach a reliable recall even in the presence of strong distractions and this is one of their main uses.

vii) Countering unacceptable behaviour using attention or inhibition training

Attention training conditions the dog to return to the trainer on feeling the electronic collar stimulation. Therefore stimulation will encourage the dog to come back when it is applied even if they are starting to run off. Management of chase behaviour is like using attention training with the ultimate distraction.

To counter the desire to engage in a chase the trainer usually has to use a higher intensity of electrical stimulation. Therefore when managing chase behaviour it is possible that trainers may have to move from attention training toward inhibition training. However if trainers have perfected and generalised attention training in many locations with various distractions and the dog reliably returns to them then it is often possible to manage chase behaviour using medium intensity stimulation.

The nature of inhibition training means that the dog generally learns not to chase in a short period of time. Dogs often learn following just one stimulation and that lesson can last a lifetime. Some dogs will require a few repetitions but if it is apparent that they are not learning using this technique then inhibition training should not be continued and referral to a professional trainer who is proficient at using electronic collars should be sought.

Stimulation must not be delivered to a dog which is out of sight until the trainer is confident that the dog will return to them when it feels electrical stimulation.



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viii) Weaning the dog off the electronic collar

With practice, training becomes embedded and many dogs no longer have to use the electronic collar. If the electronic collar has not been used for 30 days the trainer can start to **wean** the dog off it. The electronic collar can be taken off occasionally during periods when it would usually be worn, such as walks. As long as the dog does not 'lose' training or revert to bad habits, the collar can be worn less frequently and ultimately left off. However, dogs are subject to temptations and distractions and may need occasional reminders to maintain appropriate behaviour. For this reason some trainers use electronic collars to maintain good behaviour.

ix) What to do when training is not working or problems are occurring

If during training the dog is not learning or is displaying behaviour which is aggressive, unusual or of concern, use of the electronic collar should be stopped and the advice of a qualified dog trainer or a veterinary surgeon should be sought.