

## RETRACTABLE LEASH SAFETY

Retractable leashes can come in very handy for exercising your dog in safe places. They let your dog run around a bit at a distance while still being attached to you, without the leash getting tangled. But you need to be aware that they do have a dangerous aspect. I have known the following things to happen:

- An owner was walking her dog on a sidewalk along a busy street. The dog suddenly ran out to the end of the retractable leash and into the street. The panicked owner could not engage the lock quickly enough, and the dog was hit by a car even though he was still attached to the leash.
- A lady was shopping in a pet supply store with her small dog on a twenty foot retractable leash. She was not paying attention, and her dog ran around the corner of the aisle and surprised a large dog. The large dog went into prey drive, grabbed the small dog, shook it and killed it.
- An owner was walking her dog on a retractable leash, in a big park. A rabbit suddenly popped up and ran in front of the dog. The dog took off after the rabbit and hit the end of the line, yanking the handle out of the owner's hand. The dog became spooked by the handle that was 'chasing' it and kept running away. Luckily, this dog eventually came back instead of running into the street.
- An owner suffered severe 'rope burns' on her legs due to becoming tangled in the line.
- A dog that was being walked on a retractable leash (owner was not paying attention!) ran up rather rudely into the space of another dog (who being walked on leash). The two dogs got into a fight.
- A dog was being walked on a retractable leash and a head halter. The dog suddenly took off at full speed -- he hit the end of the leash, and snapped his head sideways. The dog suffered a neck injury as a result.
- An untrained dog, a confirmed leash puller, was routinely walked on a retractable leash. Because the dog was accustomed to always feeling the pressure on his collar, he learned that pulling equals freedom to go forward. He never did learn leash manners.

So – the moral of these stories is:

1. **ALWAYS PAY ATTENTION** to your dog if you are using a retractable leash. Be ready to use the brake button in a split second to stop your dog. (Always pay attention to your dog regardless of what kind of leash you are using.)
2. Maintain a firm grip on the handle – it can slip out of your hand more easily than a regular leash.

3. Never use a head halter, prong collar, or choke chain with a retractable leash. The constant tension can be uncomfortable, and send the wrong communication to the dog. A head halter used with a retractable leash can be downright dangerous. Use only a flat buckle collar with a retractable leash, or even a body harness if you have a small dog.
4. Do not allow the dog to wrap the line around your legs, or anyone else's legs. Never hold onto the thin nylon line.
5. Use a retractable leash only in a safe area where you have lots of room. **Never** in a busy crowded area.
6. If you are trying to teach your dog leash manners, avoid using the retractable leash for the time being. Later, your dog will be able to tell the difference between a regular leash and a retractable one, but it will take time. If you want to allow your dog to go a bit away from you, consider using a long line instead (only in a safe area). On a retractable leash, pulling equals freedom – exactly the opposite of what we want to convey!
7. Unless you have your thumb on the stop button, your dog can dash ten to twenty feet or more away from you in a hurry. Sometimes that sudden dash can result in dangerous situations.

A retractable leash can be a useful tool for exercising your dog in certain situations – but BE CAREFUL!