



PRESS RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Retractable Leashes: Convenience at the Expense of Safety

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Retractable leashes. They're oh, so convenient! Instead of struggling with your dog to stay at your side, you can let them trot ahead of you to explore as far as 18 feet away. Dogs can sniff to their heart's content, while you still have control of them, right? Veterinarians, dog trainers, shelters, and many pet owners will attest this is actually not the case and retractable leashes can lead to serious behavior problems and injuries to both you and your dog.

The skin on a dog's leg is much thinner than the skin on a human leg. If it gets caught in the retractable leash, it can slice through not only the skin, but tendons and muscles, too. There have also been many instances of the leash getting caught around human's legs- they always seem to wrap it around the human's legs at least once on a walk- and causing severe friction burns. The same can happen when you grab the thin line of the lead-- it can cut through your hand like butter.

Say you are walking your dog with the leash extended and he starts to eat something in the bushes. Your first instinct is to say 'No' or 'Leave it', followed by a gentle tug on the leash. Unfortunately, gentle tugs are often more forceful when the dog is that far away and there have been many instances of dogs' necks' being injured by this action. Dogs who see wildlife or another dog and bolt to the end of the lead will be snapped around and back by the neck when they reach the end of the retractable leash, which can cause serious injury. Alternatively, with a quick jerk, the locking mechanism may fail, leaving you with no control over your dog or the situation at hand.

This brings up the lack of control you have over your dog when using a retractable lead. Too often, owners of dogs who pull incessantly at a six foot lead will use a retractable lead, substituting training for convenience. No one wants to struggle and fight with a dog yanking their arm every time he decides he wants to sniff something further away. It is essential, though, that you keep your dog on a short lead and train him to heel. Six feet of leash is all you really need. If your dog is ten feet away and a neighbor's unfriendly dog charges it, you have no way to safely restrain your dog and all three of you risk getting tangled up in that thin, potentially injurious lead. The same can happen if your dog sees a squirrel or rabbit and tries to chase them-- into traffic or off into the woods or brush-- potentially causing you injury. There have been instances of these leashes breaking) despite strength claims made by the manufacturer) when a dog chases wildlife, resulting in them being hit by a car.

Another instance where retractable leashes present a problem is at your veterinarian's office. Many people in that waiting room have small dogs or cats in carriers who are terrified of dogs. It can be frightening when an unknown dog comes over with no control in place to prevent a dog fight. Even though your dog may be fine with other dogs or cats, you don't know that is the case for the people and other pets they are approaching. Remember, too, that many animals in the waiting room are sick, and you don't want your dog or theirs to become infected through close contact. NEVER use a retractable leash when you take your dog to the veterinarian.

Does all of this mean you should throw out your retractable leash? Ideally, yes. However, if you choose to continue to use a retractable leash, shorten it to six feet and lock it there. Talk to your veterinarian about basic training or dog trainers in the area to help you learn how to train your dog to behave on a short lead. A shorter, non-retractable leash will prevent injuries to you, your dog, and other dogs or wildlife you encounter.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.