**When Is a Fence Not a Fence?** An excerpt from “Installing Safe and Affordable Fencing for Dogs” written by [Pat Miller](https://apdt.digitellinc.com/apdt/speakers/view/1637) for [Whole Dog Journal](https://www.whole-dog-journal.com/)

It sounds like a childhood riddle, but the answer to the serious question “When is a fence not a fence?” is “When it’s invisible.”

Even if the sole purpose of a fence was to keep your dog contained to a designated area, underground shock fences — commonly called “electronic containment systems” — do a shoddy job at best. The two Labrador Retrievers that taunted Dubhy through our fence in Tennessee are not uncommon. Ask any animal control ofﬁcer how many stray dogs end up in the shelter still wearing their shock-fence collars.

But containment of your dog is not the only reason for having a fence. If you’re still willing to shock your dog for a containment system that has a high failure rate, here are some more reasons not to use one:

1. It doesn’t protect your dog from intruders. Black snakes may slither through our wooden fence, but the rare stray dog who wanders by can’t get to my dogs. Strays can walk right across an invisible shock boundary with impunity. So can other animals, or human intruders who may have less-than-honorable intentions toward your dog.

2. It doesn’t protect others from your dog. Even if you have one of those dogs who never tests or runs through his fence boundary (and they certainly exist), it doesn’t stop well-

meaning people, including children who can’t read your fence warning signs, from crossing the boundary into his space.

3. The initial training, during which the dog must get shocked at least once, is supremely traumatic to some dogs. Stories abound of dogs who have refused to go into their yards after being shock-fence trained, and of those who developed housetraining issues because they were afraid to go outside at all. You don’t know until it’s too late if your dog will be one who is so strongly affected by the shock.

4. The dog can associate the shock with passersby and become increasingly aggressive when he perceives them as responsible for the shock. I have had clients, and almost every trainer I know has had clients, whose dogs had no problem with aggression toward humans until they put their dogs in an underground shock fence. Insidiously, many of these owners think it’s worth one “tiny” shock to be able to let their dogs run free in their unfenced yards — because after that one shock all they get is the warning beep. What they don’t understand is the dog associates the beep with the shock, so emotionally, hearing the beep is the same as being shocked.

5. And then…the shock fence beep is similar to many other electronic beeps. Digital watch beeps, microwave beeps, camera beeps, computer beeps, alarm beeps — and the dog can have the same emotional response to those beeps. I had a client last year whose rescue dog appeared to have separation anxiety — becoming destructive when left home alone. We ultimately determined that the anxiety-related destruction occurred when the dog heard a watch beeping in the kitchen drawer — the result of being conditioned to a fence/beep/shock in a prior home.

I know there are communities that don’t allow physical fences, and that underground shock fences are all the rage in those places. I wouldn’t live in one. If I did have to live somewhere with no fence, I’d use a leash, a long line, a super recall — but I wouldn’t use an underground shock fence. Not me. Not ever. Never.

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