

Unraveling the Dangers of Retractable Leashes

A goal for most owners is walking nicely on leash, to ensure that dogs and owners are always safe, and the dogs walk on a leash that is relaxed, loose and with no tension. Using proper equipment can make a walk comfortable and safe for both the dog and the owner. This article addresses the dangers and pitfalls of using a retractable leash.

Using a retractable or extendable leash for your dog may seem convenient, but it comes with potential risks that every pet owner should be aware of. While these leashes offer increased freedom for dogs to explore their surroundings, they also pose several hazards to both the dog and their owner and, in some cities or towns, do not meet the requirements of Animal By-Laws.

As mentioned above, a loose leash is the goal for a nice, easy walk. A retractable or extendable leash prevents this from happening, as the dog is constantly adding tension to the leash. The design of a retractable leash allows the dog to move forward when they pull - which creates tension - and provides very little control for the owner.

Here are 5 dangers of using retractable leashes:

1. **Lack of Control:** Retractable leashes can compromise your ability to control your dog effectively. The design of retractable leashes means that the handle and "storage" area for the retractable cord are quite bulky. This makes it hard to easily transfer between hands or untangle if it gets wrapped around you or your dog. The long length of the leash makes it difficult to respond quickly in an emergency, such as encountering other animals, pedestrians, or traffic. We know of dogs that had full extension of their leashes, ran out into the street and were hit by cars. This lack of control can lead to accidents such as this or confrontations that could have been avoided with a shorter, fixed-length leash.
2. **Entanglement, and Hazards:** The thin cord of a retractable leash can easily become tangled around objects, people, or the dog itself. This poses a risk of injury to both the dog and people. Burns and cuts on the fingers, legs, and other body parts can occur when the cords or bands of the leash quickly brush by or become wrapped around them. In crowded areas, the extended leash can also create a tripping hazard for pedestrians, potentially causing accidents.
3. **Injuries to Dogs:** The design of retractable leashes can lead to injuries for your dog. Sudden stops or jerky movements can cause neck, spine, or trachea injuries, especially if the dog is running at full speed and reaches the end of the leash abruptly. Additionally, the thin cord can cause cuts or burns if it gets wrapped around the dog's legs or body. Further, if the owner ever let go of the handle of the retractable leash, it will fire right at the dog -potentially hitting and harming them, and could scare the dog, causing it to run away dragging the retractable leash. This is a huge risk, as now your dog is running loose and dragging their retractable leash through the park or streets.
4. **Unpredictable Reactions:** Dogs on retractable leashes may exhibit unpredictable behaviors when they encounter other animals, people, or stimuli. The sudden release of tension as the leash extends can create excitement or anxiety in the dog, leading to erratic behavior that may

be challenging to manage.

5. **Safety Concerns for Owners:** Owners using retractable leashes may be at risk themselves. If their dog suddenly bolts or pulls, in addition to the thin cord potentially causing burns or cuts to the hands, the sudden force from a large or strong dog can result in a fall or injury.

So, as you see, there are many reasons you should not be walking your dog on a retractable leash. They are bulky and hard to handle. The length of the leash makes it difficult to keep an appropriate distance between dogs or people you may meet. Yes, the leash can be locked but, if the leash becomes unlocked, the dog can rush up to another dog or other people. The other dogs they rush to may be timid, frightened, or unsure. These are some of the potential risks, to you, your dog and others, of using this type of leash.

Some towns and cities have by-law requirements that state all dogs must be walked on a restraining device of not more than 2 meters in length, attached to a collar or harness, and with sufficient strength to restrain the dog. If you are unsure of your municipal requirements, check with your local Animal By-Law Officers.

If you do choose to use a retractable leash, it's crucial to be aware of your surroundings, maintain a firm grip, and use it responsibly. To ensure the safety of both you and your dog, we encourage you to consider using a standard fixed-length leash 4 or 6 feet in length attached to a properly fitted flat collar or harness. This allows safe control and close supervision. Regularly inspect the leash, collar, and harness for wear and tear and replace them if necessary to prevent accidents.

By making informed choices, you can create a safer and more enjoyable experience for both you and your dog during your walks and outdoor activities.



Corey McCusker, CPDT-KA, is the founder of Muttz with Mannerz Canine Academy located in Stouffville. In addition, Corey is an evaluator for St John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program and created the first Kids & K9 Camp in Canada.