

Lost Dogs

Losing our dog is one of the nightmares of any loving and responsible dog owner. While we can never completely eliminate the risk of this happening, there is a lot that we can do as owners to minimise the risks and to ensure that if the worst happens, we can be reunited with our dog as soon as possible.

Minimising the Risks

Please don't forget that **it is a legal requirement for your dog to wear ID at all times**. The fact your dog is microchipped should not make you complacent.

If you have a greyhound or lurcher, make sure they wear the right collar. Ordinary dog collars are cheaper, but they do not provide a secure and safe way to control your hound. Greyhounds have long necks and small heads so can (and do) easily back out of ordinary collars. Collars that are thin or narrow can also be dangerous. If the dog decides to suddenly pull or run, the pressure of a narrow collar is enough to break a dog's neck. Similarly, you should NEVER use a narrow, extending lead with a greyhound or lurcher – invest in a good quality, long lead with secure fittings. You and your dog will be safer and happier.

Make sure your dog wears ID on its collar even when at home.

You may think your home and garden are secure, but have you considered what would happen if your dog was in the house and a burglary took place, or if there was a fire? Even if you are careful, visitors and tradesmen may not be so "dog-aware" and it is easy for a door or a gate to be left open, just for a few seconds. For a dog who has just caught sight of next door's cat, this can be enough to make a dash for freedom.

Ensure that your dog's microchip details are up to date. If your dog was lost, and the details are of your old address 200 miles away with a phone that's been disconnected, you won't get your dog back. Local Councils don't have the time to be private detectives to track you down.

Ensure you have good, up to date pictures of your dog that could be used for a dog lost poster – usually a clear head shot plus a clear shot of the body. Make sure you also have a good written description, including height, tattoos, marking, prominent scars and any other distinguishing features. Writing this when you are away on holiday or distraught with worry will be much more difficult than if you do this calmly at home, with your lovely dog right in front of you. Remember, you'd know your dog anywhere, but for a dog warden or other member of the public, one can look very much like another. If you are going away on holiday, make sure you take either a couple of prints with you or have them stored on your laptop or phone for easy access.

If Your Dog is Lost

Check OFTEN and regularly with your local Council, plus adjacent Councils.

Your dog might not know they've strayed across an invisible boundary! Remember, Welsh Councils will NOT automatically let you know if your dog is found – not all of them will scan dogs for microchips. To check which Councils do, visit www.houndmistress.co.uk which gives information on chipping and scanning policies for every Welsh Council, plus other related information on stray dog issues.

If your dog is a specific breed, immediately notify all the relevant breed rescue organisations.

Once the charity knows, they can send out emails to members, publicise the dog on Facebook and via websites and breed forums. You'll have the comfort of knowing that hundreds of other dog lovers will be keeping their eyes open. Again, good pictures and description will be helpful.

Visit websites at www.doglost.co.uk and www.lostdogsuk.com where you can post details free of charge and download posters.

Notify your microchip company immediately.

Check your pet insurance. Some policies cover the costs of advertising a lost pet e.g. making up posters to display in the area where the dog went missing.

Call your Council Cleansing Department or Highways Department with a description of your dog and a request that they keep an eye out for it – sadly, road accidents will result in the Council being called in to remove dead dogs but again, not all of these are scanned. Visit www.houndmistress.co.uk for an up to date list of which Councils do scan dead dogs – if your Council doesn't, consider taking the time to write to them to ask them to adopt this simple, humane policy to help dog owners at a difficult time.

If you have access to the Internet – use it! Post details on your social network sites, your blog, dog forums, everywhere you can think of. This is also important if there is the slightest possibility your dog has been stolen – you should aim to ensure your dog is too hot to handle because so many people are looking for it.

If theft is a possibility, ensure that all posters and publicity emphasise your dog is neutered and chipped – this will reduce its value to the thief and make it harder to re-sell.

If your dog went missing in a park or forestry, keep in constant contact with the wardens. Ensure they have pictures, and a full description. Put flyers in car parking areas.

Finally, once your dog is found, don't forget to take down any posters, thank anyone who helped and let people know you are reunited – everyone loves a happy ending!