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Assessing the safety of collars used to attach predation deterrent devices and ID tags to pet cats

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Abstract

Collar-worn deterrents reduce predation by cats while collar-mounted ID enhances return of lost animals. A perception that collars are hazardous limits their use. We defined cases as ‘collar incidents’ (cat snagged its collar or caught a paw), ‘collar injuries’ (veterinary treatment needed for a collar incident), and ‘collar deaths’ (cat died), before integrating data from veterinarians, owners from the general public and owners from a welfare society. Despite biases associated with each of these groups, taken together, the results from these indicated that collar injuries or deaths are rare. Interviews with one hundred and seven veterinarians indicated an average rate of one collar injury observed per 2.3 years of veterinary practice. At one practice, over three years, only 0.33% of 4,460 cat cases were collar injuries, while 180 cat cases at four clinics during August and November 2011 included none. The 63 owners from the general public reported only one collar injury and no deaths in a lifetime of ownership, although 27% experienced collar incidents. In contrast, 22% reported cats needing treatment following road accidents, 53% reported cats needing treatment for fighting injuries and 62% had owned cats killed on the road. Most (62%) of the 55 respondents from a cat welfare society had experienced a collar incident, but only two cats needed treatment. One died. In contrast, 31 and 58% reported cats needing treatment for road accidents and fighting, respectively, and 41% had owned cats killed on the road. Fighting and road accidents are greater hazards to roaming cats than collars, which offer the compensatory benefits of mounting predation deterrents and ID tags.

Keywords: *animal welfare, cat collar, Felis catus, pet cats, urban wildlife, wildlife protection*