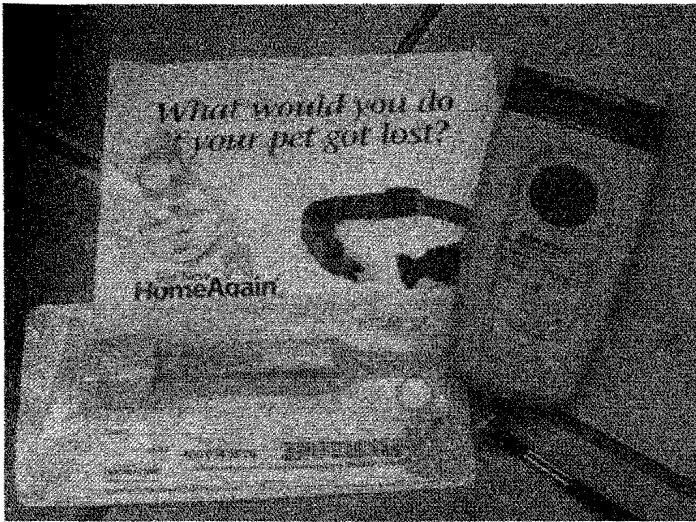


MICROCHIPPING

WHY WE NEED IT NOW

By Kathy Sutton, DVM

A microchip is a tiny transponder about the size of a grain of uncooked rice. It is implanted under the dog's loose skin over the shoulders. It has a permanent radiofrequency identification chip (RFID) that can be read by a chip scanner. Most shelters and veterinary clinics have a scanner.



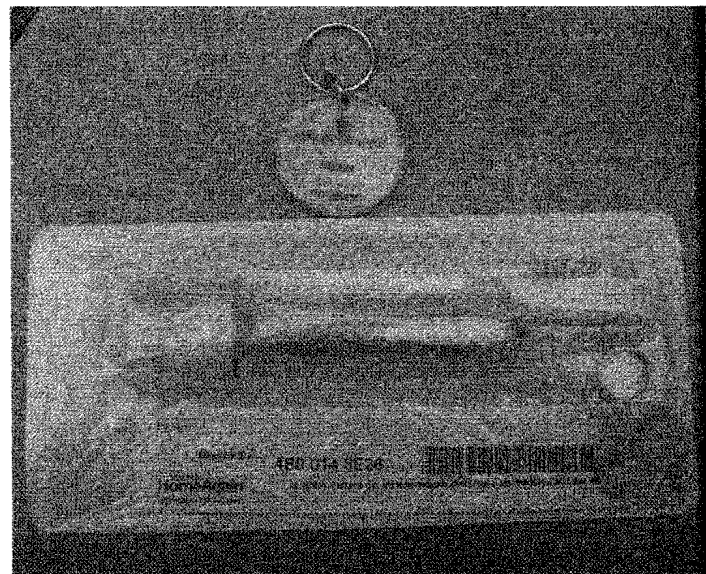
The chip is a quick and permanent means of identifying your dog. The number is unique, the chip can't be lost, and the location is easily accessible to shelter, veterinary, and other personnel. The chip number can be used to connect the found dog with his owners name and address through a national data base. The chip identification number is stored in a tiny transponder that can be read through the dog's skin by a scanner emitting low-frequency radio waves. The frequency is picked up by a tiny antenna in the transponder, and the number is retrieved, decoded, and displayed in the scanner readout window. The radio waves use a frequency much lower than AM broadcast stations use, and they must be approved by the Federal Communications Commission before being marketed.

The chip, antenna, and capacitor are encased in a tiny glass tube. The tube is composed of soda lime glass, which is known for compatibility with living tissue. The glass is hermetically sealed to keep moisture out.

Two companies, Schering-Plough Animal Health (Home Again) and AVID share the bulk of the business of pet id by microchip. Chips used by HomeAgain and AVID work on a frequency of 125kHz. Chips used internationally, for zoo animals, and for livestock use a frequency of 134kHz. Some scanners that can read the 125kHz chip cannot read the 134kHz chip. A universal scanner is being developed. On an individual basis, the lack of a universal scanner should not stop you from having your puppies microchipped. It is the best form of permanent identification.

As a veterinarian, I have heard the sad stories many times... "we only took his collar off to bathe him". I think only very clean dogs must be lost! Tattoos may be used for permanent ID- but do you think it is wise to expect a good Samaritan or shelter personnel to roll your Belgian over, clip hair on the belly or inner thigh to look for a possible faded or illegible tattoo? I am no "Kat VonD"- it is hard to get all those numbers in a nice dark print.

ID tags on a collar are great- as long as they remain attached to the collar, the information is current, and the tag has not been worn down by rubbing against the rabies tag.



When someone comes in to our clinic with a pet they have found, the first thing the receptionist does is have the pet scanned for a microchip. Most of the time the pet doesn't have an ID tag. Unfortunately, if there is no tag and no microchip the pet is more likely to be sent directly to a shelter. With a tag or a microchip we know that someone cares for this animal and we are more likely to say "go ahead and leave him with us"

or "let's get all your info and we will call if we can find the owner".

You are giving your dog a ticket home by having him microchipped.

Anecdotes- my husband found a very nice 1 yr old female yellow Labrador near his office in an industrial part of Houston. He brought her home, and I went in to full "vet" mode- checked her out, heartworm test, vaccinated, de-flea, spay, the whole works. When I finished the spay I thought "I should microchip her before I place her". Sure enough- she had a microchip! I called the AKC Companion Animal Recovery and within an hour I had her owner on the phone. She had been stolen (along with her littermate) out of the owners backyard 5 months previously. The owner lived over 4 hours drive from where she was found. She came and picked up the dog that weekend. Sure wish I had thought to check for the chip before I did all that work - I think now I am much more aware of checking all pets for chips, even if they are found on the "wrong side of the tracks".

I had a client find a young kitten sitting on the engine of her car, which was parked in a large school parking lot. We examined the kitten, checked for a microchip, BINGO! The kitten was microchipped before it left the shelter. It had been adopted, then the new owners let it go outside. It had apparently hitched a ride in the owner's truck to the school parking lot, where our client found it. There is no way that this kitten would have ever been returned to her family without the microchip.

Rescue- why we need to microchip all of our puppies before they leave to go to their new homes. Unfortunately not all Belgians will stay in their original homes forever. Even when we have the puppy buyer sign a contract, agreeing to return the Belgian to us if there are any problems, that doesn't always happen. You only have to read the stories of Belgians rescued from shelters ... "owner turn-in", "owner moving overseas", "owner died-family doesn't want dog". These are the puppies we bred, maybe 9-10 years ago. If they are microchipped they can be reconnected with their breeders. So microchip your puppies before they leave - don't think that the new owners will do it before the OFA hips & elbows, or the CERF, or when they are spayed and neutered. As the breeder, make microchipping part of your responsibility.

