

ANIMAL HOUSE

Keep pets from paper shredders
January 21, 2007 by DENISE FLAIM /

It's never what you worry about.

Ellen Lutz of Aqueboque learned that firsthand last month, when her 7-month-old labrador retriever, Striker, ambled into her home office and licked her paper shredder.

To her horror, the machine latched onto his tongue, and began to grind.

"He was screaming, and he was fighting for his life," says Lutz, adding that in his panic, the 67-pound puppy did even more damage to his mutilated tongue. She immediately disconnected the shredder, and took Striker to a nearby emergency hospital.

"I was covered in blood from head to toe," Lutz remembers.

A story this horrific is hard-pressed to end well: Striker's injury was so severe - basically, most of his tongue was gone - that he was euthanized.

"I've been in emergency medicine for 10 years, and this is the first time I have seen or heard of this," says veterinarian Gal Vatash of the East End Veterinary Emergency and Specialty Center in Riverhead, who treated Striker in December. "But I'm surprised it doesn't occur more often. Most of us have paper shredders at home, and dogs are always sticking their noses in all kinds of places."

Indeed, Striker is not alone. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has recorded five dog mutilations involving shredders, and what is not known is how many cases go unreported.

In February of last year, a young boxer puppy named Cross from [Socastee](#), S.C., caught his tongue on a home shredder, mangling an inch of it into what his owner, Sandra Clarke, called "hamburger meat."

In 2005, in South Spokane, Wash., a 7-month-old mix named Alice Lane licked a paper shredder, which in turn ground up all of her tongue. "I will never forget the sound it made when she pulled away," her owner, Adam Forney, told reporters. In her panic, the puppy bit off part of Forney's pinky. Like Striker, the dog had to be euthanized because of the extent of her injury. Even dogs that are lucky enough to survive lead compromised lives, Lutz says. "They have to be on soft diets, and they have to learn how to swallow again." For an active dog like Striker, his favorite pastime - going on hikes through the woods - would have been an impossibility, she says, because there was too much damage to his tongue to allow him to pant.

Not surprisingly, Lutz no longer has a shredder. "Before this happened, I was the shredding queen," she says. "And while I know they're really important in our lives to help destroy documents and prevent identity theft, it's going to be a long time before I'm going to have one in the house again."

Some simple precautions can ensure that accidents such as Striker's do not happen. Among them:

Unplug shredders when not in use.

Store shredders out of reach of animals (and, of course, children, especially those under 5, who can also be victims of shredder accidents). Make sure that the shredder is located in a place that is "pounce proof": Acrobatic kitties that jump atop shredders can also do terrible damage to themselves.

To avoid attracting animals, never put food wrappers through shredders.

Do not leave shredders on the "automatic" setting.

When buying a shredder, look for one with a protective bar over the opening.

To ensure that Striker's death was not in vain, Lutz has embarked on an awareness campaign to alert owners to the perils of unattended paper shredders.

She will e-mail fliers to anyone who requests her. (Contact strikerluv@yahoo.com.)

Married for 32 years, Lutz says she and her husband have never been without a dog in their household. Soon, she thinks, it might be time to think about getting another.

"Life without a dog," she muses, "is just not a life, you know?"

WRITE TO Denise Flaim, c/o Newsday, 235 Pinelawn Rd., Melville, NY 11747-4250, or e-mail denise.flaim@newsday.com . For previous columns, www.newsday.com/animalhouse

Yorkies rule (almost)

The American Kennel Club recently issued its list of most popular breeds for 2006, which included a big - or, depending on how you look at it, little - surprise.

The Yorkshire terrier has surpassed two stalwarts, the golden retriever and the German shepherd, to become the second- most-popular breed in the nation.

AKC analysts note that small dogs such as the Yorkie fill a demand for portability in our fast-paced lives, though big dogs still account for 45 percent of registrations.

The Labrador retriever again logged in as No. 1, a position it has held since 1991.

2006 most popular dogs in the U.S.

1. Labrador retriever
2. Yorkshire terrier
3. German shepherd
4. Golden retriever
5. Beagle
6. Dachshund
7. Boxer
8. Poodle
9. Shih tzu
10. Miniature schnauzer

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