

'Chipped' Dog Bleeds to Death By [Chuck Missler](#)

A tragic story in the implantable microchip saga hit California last month. Lori and Ed Ginsberg had their little Chihuahua "chipped" in order to take him camping, as required by law. The Chihuahua "Charlie Brown" bled to death in front of the Ginsbergs after the rice-sized chip was inserted under his skin. The bizarre, sad tale has spurred people in San Marcos, Texas, to protest mandatory pet chipping, and has given pet owners everywhere some pause.

As implanting microchips in pets becomes more common, and even required in some instances, pet owners consider the potential pros and cons of sticking a chip into their four-legged friends. Even more interesting is the unpopular but continuing prospect of putting microchips in human beings.

Currently, all dogs over four months old are required to be implanted with a microchip in unincorporated Los Angeles county. The law makes sense. The radio frequency identification (RFID) tags contain enough information to give animal shelters a simple way of locating an animal's owner. It helps the county better distinguish between animals with and without owners so as to better handle its animal control problem.

A growing number of pet owners have chosen to put a chip in their animal as insurance against Fido's getting lost. A simple scan at an animal shelter and the pooch or kitty can be returned to his family. The Animal Welfare League and RSPCA in South Australia are pushing to make chipping mandatory for pets. In Europe, about 25 percent of pet owners have already chipped their animals. In America, the number is about 5 percent, but there's a growing push in some areas to make chipping a requirement.

Normally, RFID implantation is a simple procedure which doesn't even require sedation. The sad case of little Charlie Brown the Chihuahua seems to be a rare exception. "We put the chip in the back in the shoulder blades, the standard place where we put them, and there really aren't any major blood vessels in that area," said Dr. Reid Loken, who implanted Charlie's chip. "I don't think it went in too deep; it was a pretty routine chipping."

After Charlie Brown bled to death, though, pet owners in San Marcos, Texas decided to protest an effort to make chipping mandatory in their city. The San Marcos Animal Services Advisory Board recently recommended that the city make a law that all pets must have RFID tags implanted as a way to reduce the number of pets put to sleep in shelters every year. Like many towns, San Marcos has 75 percent euthanasia rate.

Many pet owners, however, believe chipping should be a personal decision. Charlie Brown's death has animal lovers frightened, and other folks just don't like

having the government tell them how to best care for their pets.

"Chipping should be a voluntary decision made by a pet owner, in consultation with his or her veterinarian, after weighing the risks," states Dr. Katherine Albrecht, a Harvard-trained researcher and privacy advocate. "It should never be required at the point of a government gun."

Before little Charlie Brown bled to death, RFID chips had already raised other health concerns. A lengthy Associated Press article in September 2007 detailed the high rate of tumors caused by RFID chips in lab mice. The article described the apparent ignorance of the FDA to available research demonstrating the link between chips and sarcomas - malignant tumors - in lab mice and rats. While mice are far more susceptible to tumors than humans, or even dogs and cats, there have been a couple of instances reported in which animals with RFID chips have developed tumors. At least one was considered directly linked to the microchip implant.

While pet owners are concerned about forced chipping in their pets, other people are just plain worried about forced chipping in humans. The California Senate passed a bill in 2007 that would protect employees from forced chipping by their employers. One of the Senators who opposed the legislation, Bob Margett (R-Arcadia), thought the bill was premature. "It sounded like it was a solution looking for a problem," Margett said. "It didn't seem like it was necessary."

It hasn't been unheard of, though, for employers to make RFID chips mandatory for employees. The Cincinnati surveillance company CityWatcher.com has had employees in its secure data center get a microchip implant in one arm. RFID chips can be considered very handy for keeping track of employees' entrances and exits from a plant. Since scanners at strategic locations can sense and record whenever employees pass certain points, they can also be used to keep employees out of places they don't belong.

RFID chipping continues to be regarded as a handy way to identify animals and even humans. A simple scan can tell hospitals all about a high risk patient in emergency situations. A simple scan can help animal shelter employees quickly locate Rover's owner. A simple scan can keep the wrong people out of high security areas. Yet, the dangers to privacy and even health concerns continue to cause people to resist implantable microchips, even for their pets. RFID will likely continue to work its way into society in a growing number of ways, even as concerned citizens resist the looming Big Brother implications.