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Ontario SPCA asks pet owners to keep pets warm this winter

An Extreme Cold Weather Alert has been issued for Dufferin County, the Ontario SPCA wants to remind pet owners that the cold weather can be harmful to your pets.

Protect outdoor dogs

While many pets that enjoy the outdoors can withstand exceptional temperatures even the furriest pets will feel the bite of winter chill. Outdoor dogs must be provided adequate shelter and a constant supply of fresh water. Dogs that live outside require as a minimum a dry, draft-free doghouse soundly built of weatherproof materials with the door facing away from prevailing winds. It should be elevated and insulated, with a door flap and bedding of straw or wood shavings.

Check your pet's water and food frequently to ensure it's not frozen and use a tip-resistant plastic or ceramic bowl, rather than metal, to prevent your dog's tongue sticking to the cold metal surface. There are also heated and/or insulated bowls available that prevent water from freezing.

Use a damp towel to wipe your pet's paws and underside after being outside. Salt and other chemicals used to melt snow and ice on roads and sidewalks can irritate and burn your pet's sensitive paws - and can cause injury if ingested. Also, remove ice balls by placing your pet's feet in warm (not hot) water before drying them off with a towel. Consider using ?booties? to protect your pet's paws.

If your dog is chained outside, ensure the chain moves freely and is not frozen into the ground or ice.

Avoid car hazards

Never leave your cat or dog alone in a car during cold weather. Cars hold in the cold, acting like refrigerators, which could cause your dog to freeze to death.

Also, be aware of cats seeking warmth under vehicle hoods. When the vehicle motor is started, the cat can be injured or killed by the fan belt. Make a point of knocking on the hood or sounding the horn before starting the engine. This will warn away any cats who may be hiding in your vehicle.

Another danger for pets this time of year is ethylene glycol, which is found in antifreeze and brake fluids and is deadly to all animals. It tastes sweet, so animals may ingest it; a very small amount can be fatal. Emergency veterinary care is essential. Always clean up any spills carefully and dispose of the rags as hazardous waste. Be alert for antifreeze spills when out on walks.

Take pet precautions

Don't let your dog off leash on ice or snow, especially during a snowstorm, as dogs can lose their scent and easily become lost.

Ensure your pet always has a warm place to sleep away from drafts and off the floor. A thick cozy dog or cat bed with a blanket or pillow is great.

?If your dog spends lots of time outside during the other seasons, be sure to give them lots of mental activity if the weather prevents typical exercise.? Says Carol Hulcoop, Branch Manager ?Special chew toys, games of fetch, or ?brain games? for your pet will keep them mentally busy.?