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The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society urges caution near waterways to keep pets safe

The Ontario SPCA and Humane Society would like to remind the public to take extra precautions to keep pets safe around lakes and rivers, which may not be safe.

To help ensure a safe winter for everyone, stay vigilant around bodies of water and keep these five tips in mind when out with your furry friend:

1. Always use a leash ? Keep your dog on a leash when walking near water. If you live near the water, always supervise pets outdoors. Hypothermia can set in quickly and your dog may not be able to climb back on the ice if they fall through.

2. Play away from the ice ? Avoid areas where your dog might be tempted to explore dangerous ice. Choose safe locations for winter play and exercise.

3. Check ice safety ? Before venturing out the ice, check ice thickness. Slushy, thawed, or recently refrozen ice is particularly dangerous, as is ice near flowing water. Avoid venturing onto ice at night when visibility is reduced.

4. Know the risks in your area ? Fast-flowing water and slippery banks can increase hazards. Stay aware of your surroundings to keep your pet safe.

5. Be prepared for emergencies ? Be cautious and avoid putting yourself at risk if trying to rescue a pet. Carry a cell phone for quick access to emergency services.

?Animals are naturally curious and unpredictable, which means even the most well-trained pet can unexpectedly dart onto unsafe ice. The consequences can be devastating,? says Jennifer Bluhm, vice president of community outreach services with the Ontario SPCA and Humane Society. ?Keeping your pet on a leash near waterways and choosing safe play areas could be the difference between a fun winter outing and a tragedy.?

For more tips on keeping your pets safe this winter, visit ontariospca.ca