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Humane Society of Berks County Reminds Pet Owners That Pets Need Special Care During Cold Weather

With freezing temperatures and the threat of snow and ice, the Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC) is urging pet owners to take extra precautions to keep dogs and cats safe during the cold winter months. “Like people, cats and dogs need protection from wet and cold,” says Chief Humane Officer Joni LaVigna, of the Animal Protective Services department at the HSBC in Reading.

“When the temperature falls below 20 degrees, it is best to keep all dogs indoors, even if they have doghouses,” LaVigna says. “Short-haired dogs, small dogs and puppies should be kept indoors when temperatures are at 40 degrees or lower.” Doghouses should be elevated a few inches off the ground and spread with clean, dry bedding. A flap over the opening will help keep out drafts, she adds.

“Remember to check outdoor water bowls often when it is below freezing and break the ice or refill with water as necessary. A bowl of frozen water is useless to a thirsty pet,” LaVigna says. “Also, never leave your dog or cat alone in a car during the cold weather. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold. Your pet could freeze to death.”

Chemicals and salt used to melt snow and ice on driveways, roadways and sidewalks are another threat to your animals’ health and can irritate your pets’ paws. “Wipe your pets’ paws with a wet cloth after an outing. Also, remove ice from between your pet’s paw pads after they have been out in the snow. Snow and ice encrusted in the paw pads can cause cuts and sores,” LaVigna says.

Antifreeze, frequently used during the cold winter months, may be useful for the operation of a car but it is poisonous to animals. To prevent accidental poisonings, more and more people are using animal-friendly products that contain propylene glycol rather than the traditional products containing ethylene glycol, LaVigna says.

“The sweet smell of antifreeze attracts dogs and cats and tastes good to them. Antifreeze, however, is highly toxic and deadly,” she says. “Store antifreeze out of reach of pets and thoroughly wipe up any spills. The most likely source of the poison is radiator drainage spots in the garage. These should be flushed with water immediately.”

Cats are best kept indoors. In addition to the dangers that dogs face during the winter months, car engines sometimes provide a warm and inviting sleeping place for cats left out in the cold,” LaVigna says.

“Cats may crawl up under cars seeking shelter and warmth near car engines. However, they may get caught in the fan and become seriously injured when the engine starts,” she says. “Open the hood of your car or slap it noisily with your hand before starting the engine on cold days to startle any animal sleeping there.”

Additionally, cats and kittens often get trapped in dangerous places seeking refuge from the cold. “Just today, we responded to a call about an eight week old kitten trapped in a storm sewer, probably there to keep warm. Without our aid, the kitten may have perished overnight in the cold,” LaVigna said. Fortunately, the kitten appears to be without injury and will be placed up for adoption following a veterinary exam.

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading.

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