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Keeping Your Pet Safe from Winter Woes

To protect your pet during the cold winter months, the Humane Society/SPCA of Bexar County recommends the following safety advice:

Keep an eye on the temperature. When it falls below 20 degrees Fahrenheit, it's best to keep your pet indoors. Short-haired dogs, cats and puppies should be kept indoors when the temperature dips below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Keep your pet's coat well groomed. Matted fur won't properly protect your pet from the cold. Check your garage and driveway for antifreeze. Antifreeze tastes sweet to pets, but most brands are poisonous if consumed. Should your pet ingest any amount of antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Regularly check your pet's water to make sure it's not frozen. When your pet is outside, make sure there is plenty of fresh drinking water available. Animals can't burn calories without a fresh supply of water, and if they can't burn calories, they'll get cold. Also, use a tip-resistant, ceramic or hard plastic water bowl rather than a metal one, as your pet's tongue can stick and freeze to a cold metal.

Use a damp towel to wipe your pet's feet and underside. Ice-melting chemicals can irritate and burn the pads of your pet's feet and can cause serious injury if ingested. Another way to protect your dog's feet is to spray the pads of their feet with cooking spray or you can purchase boots for your pet.

Provide a dry, draft-free doghouse if you must keep your dog outside for any period of time. It should be large enough to allow your dog to sit and lay down comfortably but small enough to hold in its body heat. The floor should be raised a few inches off the ground and covered with cedar shavings or straw. The doghouse should be turned to face away from the wind, and the doorway should be covered with waterproof burlap or heavy plastic.

Slap the hood of your vehicle before starting it. In their search to keep warm outdoors, cats often take refuge next to a warm car engine or tire.

Keep snow from piling high next to your fence. A packed snowdrift will provide a boost for your dog to jump over the fence and escape the safe confines of your yard.

Indoors, make sure your pet sleeps away from drafts. Areas near windows or doors that lead outdoors may allow cold air to seep in and keep your pet from staying adequately warm.

Consider the amount of exercise your dog receives during colder weather. If your dog stays indoors more, it's probably getting less exercise and may need less food; however, if your pet is outside often it may need more food to burn the calories necessary to produce more body heat.

Compare the amount of exercise your dog receives during the colder months to warmer months. If your dog is indoors more at this time of year, it's probably getting less exercise and may need less food. However, if your pet is outside often in the winter months, it may need more food to burn the calories necessary to produce more body heat.



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Protect Your Pet From Hot Weather

To protect your pet from summertime hazards, please follow these tips:

- ✓ Never leave your pet in a parked car. Even cracked windows won't protect your pet from overheating or suffering from heat stroke during hot summer days.
- ✓ Exercise your dog in the early morning or evening hours, instead of during the middle of the day when it's the hottest.
- ✓ If your dog or cat are out during the day, remember that asphalt and concrete can get very hot and burn the pads of your pet's feet. Your pet must always have shelter available to protect it from extreme temperatures and inclement weather. Keep in mind, too, that pets who are older or overweight are more likely to overheat during hot weather.
- ✓ Since many people treat their lawns with pesticides at this time of year, keep your pet away from unfamiliar yards and grassy areas.
- ✓ Provide your pet with fresh, cool water every day in a tip-proof bowl.
- ✓ Keep your pet well-groomed, but resist the temptation to shave off all of his hair in an effort to keep him cool. A pet's coat will protect him from getting sunburned. The coat also acts as cooling insulation for most animals.
- ✓ Keep your pet away from spots or puddles of auto coolant in the garage, driveway, or parking lots. The sweet taste of this poisonous liquid is tempting to animals, but could lead to a fatal result.
- ✓ Don't let your dog ride in the back of an open vehicle, like a pick-up truck. Unless your dog is riding in the cab with you, your dog could be bounced or jump out of the moving vehicle. If your pet must travel in the back of an open vehicle, make sure he's safely tethered to the center of the bed where he's unable to reach the sides and is able to stand or sit on a slip-proof and cool surface.