



# OKLAHOMA 4-H WINTER CARE 4-PETS



## WINTER WEATHER AND CHILLY DOGS!

When the weather turns cold we bundle up in our coat and gloves and hurry from one place to another in order to stay warm. Just as it is important that we limit our exposure to the elements it is also important that we protect our pets from harsh winter weather.

This handout is designed to help you make informed decisions about:

- Common winter hazards
- Housing and care of pets during the winter
- Spending time outdoors with your pets
- Holiday dangers

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

American Veterinary Medical Association. (2008). *What You Should Know About Household Hazards*. Schaumburg, IL: AVMA

Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine. (2003). Safety Tips for Pets at Christmas. In *Companion Animal Newsletter* (Winter 2003, pp.3). Stillwater, OK OSUCVHS

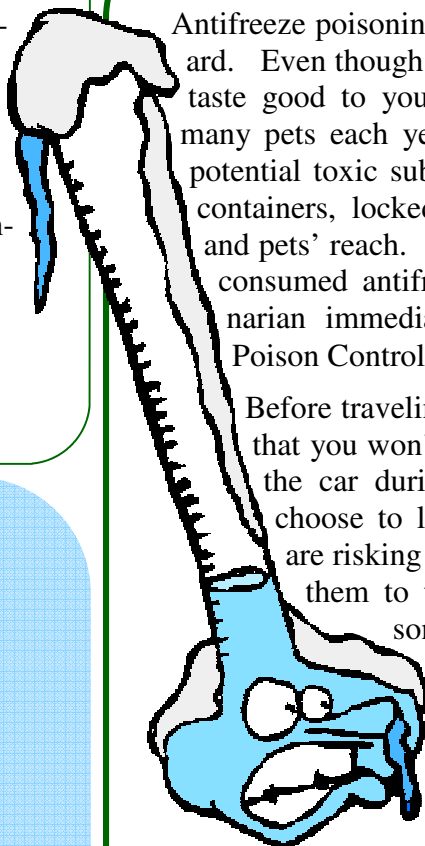
American Kennel Club. (2008). *Winter Care For Canines*. Raliegh, NC: AKC®

## WINTER HAZARDS AROUND CARS

Antifreeze poisoning is a common winter hazard. Even though antifreeze might smell and taste good to your pet it is toxic and kills many pets each year. Make certain that all potential toxic substances are kept in sealed containers, locked up, and out of children and pets' reach. If you suspect your pet has consumed antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately and/or the National Poison Control Center at 1-800-548-2423.

Before traveling with your pet be sure that you won't have to leave your pet in the car during cold weather. If you choose to leave the car running, you are risking your pet's life by exposing them to the carbon monoxide poisoning produced by the car's exhaust. Leaving pets in the car with the engine off risks exposing them to temperatures that can become too cold.

Another winter weather hazard to avoid is harming animals that climb up under the hood of a parked car for warmth. The animal might be a roaming cat, wildlife or your own pet. When the car is started again the animal may become trapped, injured or killed. As a precaution check under the hood and honk your horn before starting up the engine.



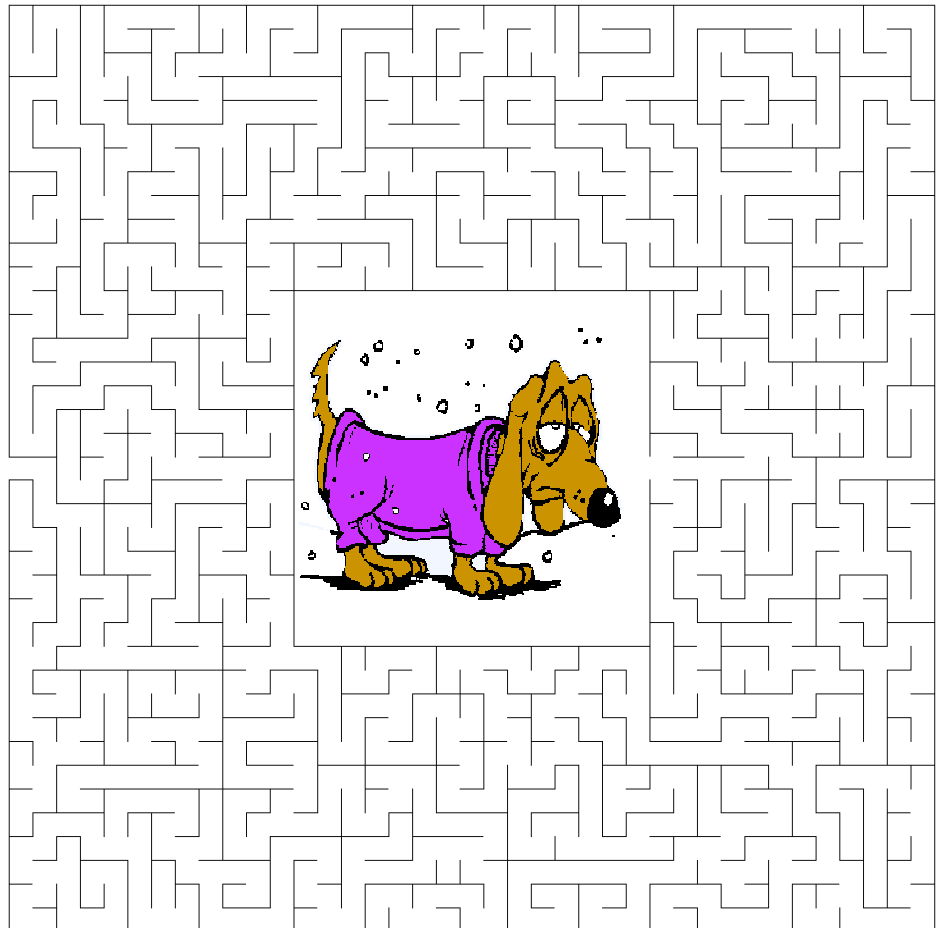
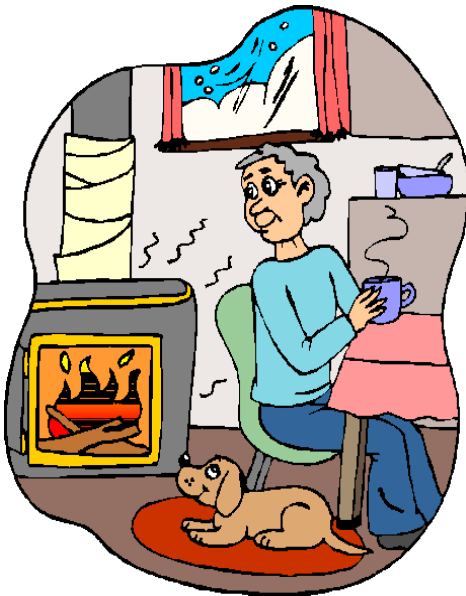
## **SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS WITH YOUR PET**

Walking or playing with your pet outdoors is a great way for both of you to get some needed exercise. Pets that have short coats, coarse hair or have been groomed short may get cold much easier, consider having them wear a sweater or a manufactured coat. While out with your pet pay attention to their behavior and bring them indoors if they get wet, begin to shiver or act weary or tired. After playing in the snow clean any ice and snow from between its toes to prevent cracked pads. If you walk on pavement that has been treated with rock salt to melt the ice, wash and dry your pet's paws thoroughly. Keeping excess hair trimmed around the toes and foot pads will make snow removal and cleaning easier.

Frostbite is not a common problem with healthy pets. However, pets that aren't used to being out in the cold, those that get wet and pets that become trapped outdoors without shelter are potential victims of frostbite. If you think your pet is suffering from frostbite, cover your pet with warm towels and call your veterinarian immediately.

Stay away from frozen lakes, ponds and creeks. Frozen bodies of water are just as dangerous for your pets as they are for you. Your pet could slip and get hurt or even fall through the ice and be unable to get out. If ever you come across an animal (tame or wild) trapped in a frozen body of water DO NOT try to rescue it yourself. Go find an adult so they can contact the appropriate authorities to determine if a safe rescue can be accomplished.

**HELP CLOVER ROVER  
FIND HIS WAY OUT OF  
THE COLD SO HE CAN BE  
SAFE AND WARM INSIDE.**



## CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY SAFETY

The Christmas season is a time of fun and excitement. Christmas **lights**, ornament hooks, tree adornments and other decorations magically appear in your home. Your pets will likely be curious because of all the new shiny items.

If your pet chews on or swallows any of these items it may damage its mouth and/or obstruct its esophagus, stomach or intestine. Pets should not be left unattended around the Christmas tree. Keep ornaments and lights high on the tree, use ribbons instead of metal hooks to tie ornaments to the tree and avoid decorating your tree with items that might be extra tempting to your pet such as **tinsel**, **candy canes** and **popcorn strings**.



Lighted candles are popular during the holidays but if left unattended, a curious pet might burn itself or start a fire. Electrical items like tree lights, toys that plug in and electrical cords pose a threat of electrical shock if a pet chews on them. Don't leave pets unattended around electrical toys and decorations.

**Holiday foods** can cause pets additional problems. Fatty, rich foods can cause your pet to get sick. Chicken and **turkey bones** can splinter and damage your pets mouth or esophagus. **Chocolate** is a common holiday treat but can easily cause your pet to be sick. Alcohol is often served during the holidays and it only takes a little to harm your pet. Your guests may not be used to being around pets, remind them not to share their treats with your pets or consider confining your pet to another area of the house while entertaining.

Common Christmas plants like poinsettias, **holly** and **mistletoe** may make your pet sick if they chew on the berries or leaves. Christmas tree water that is treated with chemicals can cause upset stomachs and **tree water** that sits for a long time can grow bacteria that may also make your pet sick. Make certain that your Christmas tree is safely secured so your pet cannot knock it over, even if your cat decides to climb to the top.

Think twice about giving someone a pet for a Christmas gift. Many pets live over 20 years of age and require daily care. If giving a pet as a gift make absolutely certain that the recipient wants the pet and is committed to providing veterinary care, daily exercise, training and lots of affection to their new pet.

### UNSCRAMBLE EACH OF THE HOLIDAY HAZARDS LISTED ABOVE IN BOLD. COPY THE LETTERS IN THE NUMBERED SPACES TO THE OTHER SPACES WITH THE SAME NUMBER TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY PHRASE.

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## UNSCRAMBLE ANSWERS

- |                    |                 |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. holly           | 2. mistletoe    | 3. chocolate    |
| 4. tinsel          | 5. lights       | 6. candy canes  |
| 7. popcorn strings | 8. turkey bones | 9. holiday food |
| 10. tree water     |                 |                 |

## MYSTERY PHRASE

Keep your pets safe this Christmas

## HOUSING OF "OUTDOOR PETS"

In freezing weather it is always best to keep your pet indoors. However, if your pet is an "outdoor pet" it is important to provide proper shelter. Not all pets are suited to be outdoors during the winter. Dogs such as Siberian Huskies and Saint Bernards have heavy fur coats designed to tolerate cold weather while dogs such as Chihuahuas and Chinese Crested do not have fur coats or body types suitable to stay in the cold for long periods of time. Regardless of the breed, it is also important that your dog be acclimated to being outdoors. Even the Siberian Husky must spend enough time out in the cold to build up a protective hair coat for frigid weather.

It is critical that your pet's shelter be insulated, dry and protected from the cold winter winds. Shelters should be just large enough for the pet to easily fit into, shelters that are larger than necessary will be more difficult for your pet's body temperature to heat the space. Your pet's shelter should have a floor along with some type of bedding (i.e. blankets, pads, straw...) to protect the pet from the cold ground temperatures.

North winds are the most common during the winter so face the opening of your shelter away from the North and provide a flap to cover the opening. The flap will reduce drafts and help capture your pet's body heat.

Keep in mind that pets that aren't usually kept outdoors aren't as tolerant of the cold and should not be left outdoors for very long during cold weather. During periods of severe inclement weather all pets should be moved into a home or heated shelter.

Use caution with supplemental heat sources. Fireplaces should have a screen to protect you pet from being burned. Your pet doesn't understand that portable heaters can be dangerous so they may burn themselves or knock the heater over and start a fire.



## FEEDING AND WATERING DURING COLD WEATHER

If your pet spends a lot of time outdoors in the winter you need to provide it extra food. It takes more energy in the winter to keep warm, so additional calories will be necessary.

Fresh water is just as important in the winter as it is during the summer. Make certain that your pet has access to warm water several times during the day. Snow and ice are not a proper substitute for water.

For more information about 4-H Companion Animal Projects log on to <http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/>.

## GNAW ON THIS

1. Give a presentation at your 4-H club about the importance of making sure that your pets are well taken care of during the winter months.
2. Do a winter assessment of your pet and its living conditions. Does your pet have access to dry and draft-free shelter at all times? Is your pet well adjusted and suited for cold weather? Will your pet have access to unfrozen water several times a day? Will you need to adjust your pet's feed to provide additional calories?