

## This Month: Holiday Safety

### Holiday Safety

Christmas Trees and Decorations – Oh Christmas Tree, oh Christmas tree, how dangerous you can be. The staple decoration of the holiday season, a sparkling evergreen tree is a bright spot in nearly every house this season. But Christmas trees can be dangerous to our favorite furry friends who might be a little overly curious towards this new, very large decoration in the middle of their previous play-space. While mildly toxic sap and preservatives may cause stomach upsets if ingested, pine needles cannot be digested and may puncture intestines or cause blockages. Artificial trees are also not safe; most have lead in their branches to make them bendable. A pet may accidentally knock over the tree by sniffing too closely or trying to climb inside, while a dog may find that his favorite bathroom fixture has just moved indoors and may urinate on the tree. Rambunctious pets may knock over and play with ornaments that resemble bright toys, resulting in broken ornaments that can be swallowed or stepped on. Put up a gate, secure the tree with fishing wire to the wall and/or ceiling, and make the tree-stand extra stable with weights to keep pets from accidentally knocking it over. Also, restrict access to standing tree water - preservatives, flame retardants, insecticides and fertilizers are all toxic to pets.

Decorations on the tree are just as dangerous as the tree itself. Broken ornaments can cut up the feet, mouth and intestines of a pet hungry or interested enough to eat them; tinsel, flocking and artificial snow are all mildly toxic and can create blockage if ingested; and angel hair can cut your pet's face, mouth and intestines and cause blockage. Blockages of this type in the intestines are called 'linear foreign bodies' and can create an emergency requiring surgery. Strings of lights can burn your pet's skin if the bulbs are big enough. Broken light bulbs can cut, tangled cords can trip up or get caught around a pet, and chewed cords can cause shock or deadly electrocution. Bubble lights are also moderately toxic if their liquid contents are ingested. Edible garlands like popcorn strings can cause indigestion and blockage, and the hooks used to hang ornaments can get caught in the mouth, esophagus, stomach and intestines. Don't put fragile, edible, nor unsafe decorations near the lower branches of the trees just in case pets get a little too curious.

Holiday Plants – Poinsettias, ivy, holly, mistletoe, Christmas cactus, hibiscus and hemlock are all toxic to pets if ingested. Holly (both the leaves and the berries), mistletoe, and poinsettias are especially dangerous and prominent this time of the year. If you can, buy fake plants to decorate your home, or keep all plants up and out of the reach of your pet.

Food – Many pets get upset stomachs over the holidays due to table scraps and very rich foods. Gravy, grease, yeast dough and uncooked meat can all cause gastric

upset and pancreatitis (an inflammation of the pancreas), and alcohol, tobacco and chocolate can poison the system. Bones, even small fish bones, can puncture the intestines, so keep all bones out of your dog's reach. Macadamia nuts and grapes/raisins contain unknown toxins which can affect the digestive and nervous system of pets (in the case of the nuts) or the kidneys (in the case of the grapes and raisins). Strings to tie up roasts, soaked through with juice from the meat, can be very tempting to a dog if left out or found in the trash and can easily cause an obstruction in the digestive tract.

To keep your favorite furry friend safe from the dangers involved with ingesting the wrong kinds of food, keep an eye on your pet during busy times when treats and meals are being prepared or set out. Make sure to let your guests know not to feed your pet table scraps and clean up all dishes and glasses immediately so pets can't find leftovers and eat them. To keep your pet from begging for table scraps and digging in the trash, feed them their meal before a party so they won't be hungry during your own dinner. If your pet does eat too much and ends up with an aching tummy, try a dog food that is easy on the digestive system for a few days, like Science Diet I/D canned food.

Garbage – Although the kitchen is spotless and everything potentially dangerous has been put away in cupboards and the trash can, don't be surprised if your pet finds his way into trouble. Trash cans can be a treasure-trove of yummy tasting treats for pets, and many will go to extreme lengths to get at them. Aluminum foil and plastic wrap with crumbs and juice on it can smell very good to a dog, even if it doesn't taste as good as it smells. Candy wrappers, cups, plastic flatware, plastic beverage rings, skewers, and bones can all be stolen from the trash and ingested, causing problematic stomach upsets and even blockage that will need to be surgically repaired. Possible food poisoning, bleeding, discomfort, and suffocation or choking could result from a nosy pet getting into the garbage, so keep your garbage safe in a pet-proof cupboard below the sink or even outside in a garbage can with a tight lid.

Presents – Nearly everyone will agree that presents are the best part of the holiday season, but some presents can be dangerous for your pet. Pet treats wrapped under tree can easily be found and eaten (bows and all) by a dog with a sharp nose. Perfumes and colognes are toxic if ingested, and ribbons, yarn, wrapping paper and polystyrene foam can cause obstructions. Toys have small parts that can be eaten and cause choking or damage the intestinal tract, and too many rawhide or milk-bone presents at once can cause indigestion or choking.

Candles/Potpourri – While candles and potpourri can create a warm and inviting atmosphere around the house, they can also result in singed and burned whiskers and fur, as well as pets knocking them over and starting fires in the house. Pets eating potpourri can be dangerous as well, because although it smells and looks inviting the oils in potpourri can be toxic or cause respiratory irritation. Always keep candles and potpourri up high on sturdy tables out of reach of your pet, and always supervise any pets in the same room as a burning candle or oil burner.

Fireplaces – One warm image the colder holidays conjure in our minds is that of a warm fireplace, burning bright and decked with garland and stockings; but burning firewood can cause bronchial irritation in pets who inhale too much smoke and ashes, as well as burns, skin irritation, and digestive distress (color salts are moderately toxic if ingested). Popping wood can cause sparks to fly, so use a fire screen while burning firewood and glass or metal doors when not in use.

Guests – The family is over, friends are showing up soon, and your pet is a bundle of excited or perhaps nervous energy. The number of guests entering a home around the holidays is vastly increased from that of the rest of the year, and having too many guests over can cause a few problems for our furry friends. Children harassing pets to play or pet them can cause even the most mild-mannered dogs to become nervous and snappy, small dogs and cats can easily get underfoot and may be stepped on or kicked accidentally, and any nervous or adventurous pet may run out a continually opening door. Guests may take it upon themselves to feed your pet things they don't know it shouldn't have, may have allergies that are set off by your pet, or may even be frightened of dogs or cats. To be safe remind your guests that you have a pet and educate them as to what they should or should not feed him, brush up on obedience training, move your pet to a quiet room with its food, water and a comfortable bed and toys, or even consider boarding your dog or cat at a kennel over the days you are expecting a lot of company.

### Pets as Gifts?

If you are planning to give a pet as a gift this holiday season, give a gift certificate or pet product such as food or books instead. While many people would be thrilled to find a puppy under their tree, the puppy might not show the same enthusiasm. New pets need a steady routine and time to get used to you and your home. Introducing a new pet at such a busy time, with so many possible dangers it can get into (and we all know how much puppies and kittens like to get into things they shouldn't!) it would be much safer for both of you if you wait until the daily routine has been re-established and the environment is back to normal.

### Pet gifts:

The best present you can give your favorite furry friend this season is time to play and relax together. While Nylabones and Kongs are fun for a time, nothing will beat you spending some quality time playing with your pet. Even just relaxing in front of the TV, scratching their bellies and ears is a wonderful present for a dog or cat, and much more enjoyable to them than any stocking-stuffer toy you could buy them. If you do decide to give your pet a present under the tree, make sure it is a safe one, with no small parts that can be chewed off and choked on. If the gift is edible, make sure your pet only eats it in moderation to alleviate any potential tummy aches.

### Seasonal Safety

Another concern at this time of the year is car fluids, especially anti-freeze. With the cooler weather approaching, many people will be changing and topping off their anti-freeze and other car fluids that contain anti-freeze with the toxic ingredient ethylene glycol. Spills that are left on the ground are sweet smelling and good tasting to dogs, but very deadly. Early signs of ethylene glycol poisoning may include stumbling or 'acting drunk'. Minutes to hours can make the difference between successful treatment and death, so if you think your dog has ingested any car fluids, call the vet immediately and let them know you are on your way!

## Success Story: Ruby!

Ruby is a seven year old female cat that presented for blindness and vomiting after another vet had diagnosed the blindness as being due to glaucoma. A physical exam was performed and it was determined that Ruby did have some vision but was mostly blind. Eye pressures were measured and were found to be normal (glaucoma was ruled out) and the back of the eye was examined with an ophthalmoscope. Abnormal changes discovered in the retina suggested high blood pressure. Blood pressure tests confirmed this and an x-Ray demonstrated heart enlargement. A diagnosis of hypertrophic cardiomegaly (or HCM) was made. HCM causes the heart to enlarge and blood pressure to increase; damage to the retina may result and cats also vomit more often due to pressure changes and fluid accumulation in their lungs. It is most commonly seen in cats less than five years old; however, it is by no means unusual to diagnose primary HCM for the first time in cats as old as seven or older. A similar disease in humans has been determined to be inherited genetically, where the mutation causes weakness of the contractile protein in the cells of the heart muscle. We have seen another colony of cats at the FRAH that had strong evidence of this inheritance pattern, with several kittens from one queen being affected with HCM. Other evidence of breed and familial inheritance suggests that, in cats, it is likely that the disease is caused by a mutation in the same gene. Ruby was placed on medicine to reduce her high blood pressure and help her heart push blood along more efficiently. Follow up tests revealed a reduced blood pressure, a more normally shaped heart, and one year later, an improvement in vision!

## Dates, Upcoming News, Specials:

### Attention Boarding Clients:

Boarding prices have changed starting November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005 due to the increase in prices for maintaining our facility. The new prices are as follows:

Dogs: \$13/night

Cats: \$11/night

We are already booked for this Christmas season, but are recommending clients try kennels outside of the city of Charleston, in places like Ravenel and Goose Creek. We also have information on a home sitter available for those interested – please give the FRAH a call for her phone number.

Fall and spring's milder weather is the perfect breeding ground for ticks. If your dog gets a tick, buy some tick tweezers to safely remove the entire tick (including the head) and make sure to keep your dog well protected with Frontline or Preventic collars.

Want to get a head start on next year's flea season? Keeping your pet on Frontline or Revolution throughout the winter months will insure that they will be flea-free come next spring! Doing the same for heartworm prevention will insure that your favorite furry friend is heartworm negative all year long too!

Did you miss last month's newsletter? Don't worry! The FRAH Newsletter is now on the web!

[www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm](http://www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm)

## December skin tests!

**Get \$20 off a skin test in December!** Has your dog been itchy all summer? Winter is the perfect time to get him tested to find out exactly what he is allergic to. Because your pet must be steroid-free (no prednisone, ear drops, or shampoos containing steroids) for six weeks before the tests, and antihistamine-free (benadryl) for two weeks prior, winter is an ideal time to get them done with less antigens and fewer fleas out to bug your furry friend. For more information on skin allergies, see the September edition of our Newsletter at [www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm](http://www.follyroadanimalhospital.com/newsletter.htm)