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MEMA's PET SAFETY TIPS FOR THE WINTER MONTHS

FRAMINGHAM, MA – “As the harsh winter months settles in, it is important that you think about keeping your pets safe from all of the dangers that the season can present,” states Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency Director Don Boyce. “MEMA offers some tips to help insure your pet’s safety.”

- Do not leave your pet outdoors when temperatures drop below freezing. Dogs need outdoor exercise, but take care not to keep them outdoors for lengthy periods of time during very cold weather. Pets that are mostly indoors need time to adapt to cold temperatures by building up a thicker coat and toughening their footpads for ice and snow. Short-coated dogs may feel more comfortable wearing a sweater during walks. Dogs and cats are safer indoors during all sorts of extreme weather.
- Care for your pet’s feet. If your pet walks on salted or chemically treated areas, be sure to wash its paws after your walk. Gently rub the bottom of the feet to remove these irritants as soon as your dog is off the road. Many dogs need boots in cold weather, regardless of their coat length. If your dog frequently lifts up its paws, whines or stops during walks, it may be demonstrating that its feet are uncomfortably cold.
- Wind-chill is a threat to pets, even those protected by shelters. Outdoor dogs must be protected by a dry, draft-free doghouse that is large enough to allow the dog to both sit and lie down comfortably, but small enough to retain body heat. The floor should be elevated a few inches off the ground and covered with cedar shavings or straw. The entrance of the doghouse should be turned to face away from prevailing winds, and the entrance should be covered with a flap of heavy waterproof fabric or heavy plastic.
- Pets who spend a greater amount of time outdoors in the winter need more food. Maintaining warmth depletes energy. Routinely check your pet’s water dish to ensure the water is fresh and not frozen. To prevent your pet’s tongue from freezing to its feeding or drinking bowl, plastic, rather than metal food and water bowls are preferred.
- Locked cars are a danger in the winter. Never leave a pet locked inside a car during extremely cold weather. Cars can actually act like a refrigerator, holding in cold air, putting your pet at risk.

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- Be leery of frozen bodies of water. Always keep your pets on a leash when walking them near suspected frozen bodies of water. The ice may not be sturdy enough to support your pet. If a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt to rescue your pet yourself; call 9-1-1 or go for help.
- Antifreeze and de-icing chemicals can be hazardous. Antifreeze has a sweet taste that can attract animals. Always store antifreeze out of reach and clean up spills. Antifreeze made with propylene glycol can actually be swallowed in small amounts and not injure pets, wildlife or humans.
- Warm automobile engines are dangerous for cats and small wildlife. Parked vehicles can attract small animals, which may crawl under the hood seeking warmth. To avoid injuring hiding animals, bang on your car's hood to scare them off before starting your engine.

For additional information about keeping your pets safe, go to the State of Massachusetts Animal Response Team (SMART) website at www.smart-mass.org.

The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA and Winter Preparedness, go to www.mass.gov/mema.