

# Warm words for dogs and cats

BY STEVE DALE, FREELANCE FEBRUARY 18, 2009

In cold winter weather, dogs and cats can suffer frostbite. The tips of their ears and tails are especially susceptible. Dogs with long ears, like basset hounds and Weimaraners, are most at risk.

While most dogs wear their own winter coats, small dogs need a little help to keep warm in freezing weather. The smaller the dog, the more difficulty it has maintaining body temperature, which is why a coat or sweater is a good idea for pooches under nine kilograms.

Sight hounds have too little body fat to protect them against the cold. That's why breeds including greyhounds, Salukis and whippets also need winter wear to keep them comfortable.

Of course, some dogs relish the cold. Breeds like malamutes, Siberian huskies and Samoyeds sometimes prefer frigid temps to being indoors. Still, if even an Arctic dog is going to be outside for any period of time, it requires unfrozen drinking water (you can buy water bowls with heaters to prevent freezing) and shelter from wind and snow.

Booties might not appear macho, but even sled dogs wear them. Because dogs perspire from their paws, little ice balls can form between the paw pads, and that can be very uncomfortable. Also, with unprotected paws, it can hurt to walk on street salt.

Other options to prevent ice balls and deter street salt from sticking to a dog's pads include spraying an unflavoured non-stick cooking spray on the paws, or using a wax-based cream called Musher's Secret (made in Canada and available online and at many pet stores).

Cats are pretty resourceful at finding warmth, but to a cat seeking heat, a warm car hood is easy to find. As a result, veterinarians in cold climates often treat cats who have been seriously injured when people start their car engines. It's not a bad idea to follow Tony Orlando's advice: Knock three times on the car hood before turning the key.

Desperate for water that's not frozen, cats kept outside in winter may drink anything they can find. Antifreeze is tempting to most pets, but less than 50 millilitres can kill a Great Dane, and five millilitres can end the life of a small dog or a cat.

Another danger is a closed garage. It only takes about 10 minutes for a 4.5-kilogram pet to die from carbon-monoxide poisoning in a sealed garage with a car running.

A common concern, particularly as the weather wavers around freezing point, are ponds, rivers and lakes. The ice may not be solid. Dogs are as susceptible to hypothermia as people. Those who fall

into freezing water might die. In larger bodies of water, another concern is a confused dog taking off in the wrong direction, away from shore. While the water might be frozen at the shoreline, it might not be farther out.

Snowdrifts can be another danger. Jumping in and out of snow isn't like walking down the street, and dogs can pull muscles they're not accustomed to using. The rule is simply not to allow the pup to overdo it. Some dogs just don't know when to stop, and it's up to their people to step in to prevent injuries and to keep them safe.

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Steve Dale welcomes questions from readers. Personal replies cannot be provided, but he will answer questions of general interest in his column. Write to Steve Dale at Tribune Media Services, 2225 Kenmore Ave., Suite 114, Buffalo, N.Y. 14207. Email: [petworld@aol.com](mailto:petworld@aol.com).

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