

Take steps to keep your pet safe, well this holiday season

By Frank Bryce Special to the Sun-News

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It seems that every holiday we get safety tips from a variety of sources concerning pet care and this holiday season is certainly no exception. As each of us tries to spread good will and cheer and charitable help to those around us, we need to be positively sure to provide for the safety and well-being of those closest to us, including our companion animals.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Humane Society of the United States, American Veterinarian Medical Association and pet professionals all have helpful and important information on the Internet. The pet help line with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, reached at (575) 523-8020, may be able answer questions or direct pet owners to helpful resources for holiday issues.

Much of the information offered to protect our family during the holidays is also applicable to family pets, in particular cats and dogs, and any harm to family pets can seriously impact the family.

This can range from the emotional turmoil of the illness or loss of a pet due to ingestion of poisonous substances or indigestible materials to physical harm to visitors being bitten or devastating home fires caused by pets chewing wires or tipping candles. In the event of some accidental ingestion or injury to your pet, you should immediately seek veterinary help.

Some positive steps recommended for pet safety might include altering or modifying displays and decorations so they are out of harm's way. Take this example: Due to a new puppy in the household, a friend selected a tabletop Christmas tree for display this holiday season instead of a large standing tree with a base on the floor. Although considered a sacrifice to forgo selection of a large and live tree this season, the friend felt it was worth the alteration to ensure the safety of her puppy and to eliminate the stress or invitation for trouble with a traditional tree.

Other considerations during the holiday season for companion animals include being cautious with visitors coming and going so pets do not escape, threaten visitors, or soil holiday outfits with excited greetings. It's important to keep things as routine as possible so pets do not stress or feel abandoned.

Consider adding some extra food to the pet's diet, as appropriate, if the animal is outside more or for outside pets as the weather gets colder since they need more food to keep warm. Be sure to provide warm, dry and draft free shelter and bedding whether the animal is inside or outside. Place all toxic plants and other dangerous materials that could be ingested, well out of reach of the pets or eliminate these from areas where pets are allowed unless supervised. Many holiday treats, food and beverages are dangerous to pets so they should be well out of reach or closely monitored.

In addition, be sure guests understand how your pets may behave or react if they pet or play with them. Many pets are truly frightened by noise and may react badly if the noise is loud, excessive, or sudden. So, if appropriate, consider a quiet or safe place for the animal away from the festivities or until things calm down. And everyone, including our pets, loves new toys and gifts but be sure these are relatively indestructible, pieces cannot be ingested and are designed for your pet.

Remember how much joy our cats and dogs and other pets have given us throughout the year and share your love with them for a safe holiday.

Frank Bryce is the president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.