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While it's easy to think that dogs are immune to cold because of their fur, the fact is that more dogs perish in the winter than at any other time of the year. Some are better equipped to handle the cold weather than others. Frostbite, hypothermia and antifreeze poisoning present the biggest winter threats to pets. By taking a few precautions and using common sense, pet owners can keep their dogs safe this winter.

**Beware of cold temperatures.** While many pets can be safe in outside temperatures with proper shelter (see below), puppies, smaller dogs, older dogs and cats should not be left outdoors when the temperature falls below 40 degrees.

**Watch for signs of frostbite and injury.** Dogs' ears, paws and tails are especially susceptible to frostbite. If you suspect frostbite, contact your veterinarian. If your dog plays on ice or hard, frozen dirt, his paws are susceptible to cuts as his paws slide across these rough surfaces. Always wipe your dog's feet after a walk in the snow to remove ice balls and salt deposits from the road. Salt irritates a dog's paws and can be toxic if ingested. Use only pet-safe ice melt.

**Keep an eye out for hypothermia.** If you notice shivering, lethargy, low heart rate and unresponsiveness, bring your pet into a warm area, place a light blanket over him, and call your veterinarian.

**Eliminate the possibility of poisoning.** Unfortunately, dogs like the sweet taste of antifreeze, which can cause sickness or even death if ingested. Make certain that all antifreeze containers are well out of reach of dogs and thoroughly clean any spills immediately.

**Keep older, arthritic pets inside.** These animals should not be left outside under any circumstances. Escort the older dog outside for toileting and use a leash if the yard has ice or snow. Older dogs can easily fall and seriously injure themselves.

**Provide a protective shelter.** If your dog or cat stays outside much of the time in the winter, his shelter needs to be raised a couple of inches off the frozen ground or concrete. The inside needs to have a blanket, cedar shavings or straw, which should be changed frequently to keep him warm and dry. Add a flap to the door, and face the shelter away from the weather. The size of the shelter should be large enough so your pet can sit and stand, but small enough so his body heat will be retained in the house. Use a plastic water bowl to ensure your pet's tongue does not get stuck to cold metal, and change the water often to keep it from freezing.

**Supply fresh water.** Use a plastic water bowl to ensure the dog's tongue does not get stuck to cold metal, and change the water often to keep it from freezing.

**Provide an appropriate amount of food.** If your dog remains active in winter, he'll burn more calories in the cold—and needs about 10 percent more food to compensate. If your dog becomes

less active in the winter, try to keep him from gaining extra weight by cutting back his food and making sure you continue going for walks and playing with him.

**Keep your dog on a leash.** Dogs rely heavily on a strong sense of smell to figure out where they are and can easily get lost during winter storms. Snow covering the ground will make their surroundings less familiar. Keeping your dog on a leash at all times – especially during winter storms – can help stop your dog from becoming lost. Also talk to your veterinarian about micro-chipping your dog, just in case.

**Don't leave your dog inside of a parked car.** Most people know this rule for the summer. A parked car can quickly amplify the effects of extreme weather. During the winter it can act as an icebox and trap cold air inside.

**Livestock Protection:** Large animals, such as cattle, horses, sheep and goats, also need help with winter weather. Cattle stay warm by increasing their heart rate, respiration and blood flow. This is why livestock need to increase their feed intake during the winter months. Keeping outdoor animals dry and warm is key. If fur is wet and matted, it loses its insulating qualities. Shelter should be windproof and insulated. Providing bedding of straw, hay or blankets will provide extra warmth.

**With the frigid temperatures quickly approaching, PASART encourages all residents of the Commonwealth to take precautions when using space heaters.** According to the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Incident Reporting System, national estimates for the leading reported causes of fires in residential buildings for 2012, the most recent year data is available, are: Cooking fires at 182,000 fires and second, heating fires at 45,200 fires.

The leading factor contributing to home heating fires was failure to properly clean heating equipment, primarily chimneys before use. Placing things that can burn too close to heating equipment or placing heating equipment too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattress, or bedding, were among the leading factors contributing to ignition in fatal home heating fires and accounted for more than half of home heating fire deaths.

In the event of a fire, your pets need protection as much as the rest of the family. Here is a list of some things you can do in your home...

- Be sure you have working smoke detectors on every level of your home.
- Have an emergency exit plan that includes your pets, and practice the plan regularly.
- Make sure pets always wear identification
- Research a safe place to take your pets.
- Assemble a disaster kit.
- Give a key to a trusted neighbor.
- Ask your local fire department if they carry pet oxygen masks on their fire trucks.
- Listen to your dog.

**About CARTs:** County Animal Response Teams were formed as an initiative the PA State Animal Response Team (PASART) a private non-profit organization which receives the majority

of its funding from the federal government through the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). CARTs consists of volunteers from all walks of life - from experienced emergency responders, veterinary technicians, animal trainers and handlers to other men and women concerned with the welfare of animals. CARTs are based on the principals of the Incident Command System developed by the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#), and involves a coordinated effort of government, corporate and animal organizations. For more information regarding Pennsylvania CARTS visit [www.pasart.us](http://www.pasart.us)