

Paw Prints #5 Dec '06
Christmas Safety
Dr. Pat Mahoney, DVM

I've learned so much preparing to write this month's column! Holiday safety tips abound on the internet. Veterinary medicine is such a fascinating subject since we deal with such a variety of patients, clients, and situations that just really weren't covered in the textbooks. And some of what was covered in the textbooks is no longer accurate.

An excellent and reliable safety resource is the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) website www.aspca.org, especially the "Animal Poison Control" tab. The Animal Poison Control Center was established at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine in the year I graduated from there ... a long time ago! Accessible for emergencies by both the public and veterinarians 24/7/365, their Hot Line phone # is 888-426-4435 (1-888-4ANI-HELP). A \$55 fee is charged for their consultation. There is no substitute for the depth of knowledge this service provides to help veterinarians and pet owners assess a toxic risk and help manage the consequences.

Despite popular belief, the ever present Christmas poinsettia is not a seriously toxic plant for our pets. It can be a minor irritant to the mouth and stomach, but it is not poisonous. Many lilies, on the other hand, can be deathly toxic to cats even in minute quantities. Mistletoe and holly do have potential to cause problems if eaten.

Some holiday foods may cause problems with our house pets. Chocolate can act as a super dose of caffeine. The darker the chocolate or the smaller the pet, the greater the risk. Likewise coffee products including beans, grounds, or chocolate covered beans can be risky. Yeast doughs may not only cause bloating, but also possibly serious ethanol toxicity as the yeast ferments.

The Christmas tree can be a focus of so much joy but what a resource for our pets! From glass ornaments, fertilized water, tinsel or ribbons, electric cords ... Oh My, "What's a mother to do!" Kinda takes the fun out of it doesn't it?

It is almost impossible to provide a 100% safe environment for our pets or our children, but some common sense and a little preparation seem like the best course of action. We do need to think through the resourcefulness of an active new kitten ... perhaps a smaller tree this year,

supported well, with few dangling ornaments on the lower branches. It may be best not to wrap a box of chocolates and place it under the tree for our dachshund to hunt down.

And I would suggest it is always best to call your veterinarian if an accident happens. We are so fortunate to have 24-hour emergency and critical care available in the Fox cities. Please have ready access to your veterinarian's office phone number, and note that the Fox Valley Animal Referral Center # is 993-9193 and the ASPCA Poison Control Center is 888 426-4435.

Have a safe and Happy Holiday Season ☺ Dr Pat Mahoney

Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the e-mail link at www.ameranimal.com