

Antifreeze poisoning a serious threat to area pets

Written by Darci Tomky

Antifreeze poisoning is the most common cause of poisoning of dogs and cats in the United States, and local veterinarian Dr. Darrell Tomky is urging area residents to become aware of the dangers.

Each year more than 10,000 dogs and cats are poisoned with automotive antifreeze. Its major component, ethylene glycol, is toxic to all creatures, including humans.

Only one or two teaspoons of antifreeze will poison a cat while three tablespoons are enough to kill a medium-sized dog.

“I encourage people to be careful with their dogs and with their antifreeze,” said Tomky, noting dogs are more likely to drink antifreeze than cats because they like the sweet taste.

Tomky said Holyoke Vet Service recently treated a dog who suffered from antifreeze poisoning. “It’s a horrible death,” he said.

Ethylene glycol has an immediate and long-term effect on a dog’s body.

As soon as 30 minutes after drinking antifreeze, a dog will become ataxic or drunken in appearance. Twelve hours later, those symptoms disappear, and the owners may think everything is alright. The only thing they might notice is the pet drinking more water than usual.

Tomky said two days later signs of irreversible kidney damage as well as liver damage will be apparent. Dogs become lethargic with vomiting and diarrhea.

If pet owners know a dog or cat has consumed antifreeze, it’s important to take it to a veterinarian immediately. The sooner poisoning is detected, the better chance the pet has of survival, depending on the amount of antifreeze it drank.

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Tomky reminded pet owners it's their responsibility to keep track of their pets, not letting them run loose around town.

Other residents need to be aware of their automobile antifreeze usage. Antifreeze poisoning can occur in all climates because ethylene glycol is used in all radiator coolants.

Sometimes pets find discarded antifreeze or they lick empty containers or puddles that form below a leaky radiator system. Be sure to discard old coolant properly and thoroughly clean up any leaks around vehicles.

Ethylene glycol can also be found in brake fluid, liquid rust inhibitors, hydraulic fluids and solar collectors.

Tomky noted the West Virginia Senate just approved a bill that would require a bitter-tasting additive for antifreeze.

"This is the start of something," he said, predicting within the next several years most states will move toward similar legislation to make antifreeze less appealing to animals.

Until then, pet owners and community members must do their part in preventing antifreeze poisoning.