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Make This a Safe Year for You and Your Pet

Along with your own New Year's resolutions this year, don't forget to include your pets! Not only is good nutrition and exercise a great commitment for you and your pets this year, but knowing how to keep your pets safe from common and lesser known risks is another important goal. Here are some things you should know to fulfill this goal:

- **Harmful Foods.** Did you know **onions, garlic, grapes and raisins,** and **macadamia nuts** are all toxic to our pets? Onions and garlic can cause severe anemia, whereas grapes and raisins could cause kidney failure. **Peach, cherry and apricot pits** include a form of cyanide that can be released if chewed up. For that reason, it is important to keep dogs away from whole fruits and fruit trees that have dropped old fruit.
- **Toxic Treats.** Most folks know that **chocolate** is toxic, but did you also know that most **sugar free gums, candies, toothpaste, mouthwash** and treats are also toxic? Sugar free products usually contain **Xylitol** which can cause a life-threatening drop in your pet's blood sugar within 30 minutes of ingestion, not to mention liver toxicity!
- **Poisonous Plants.** **Lilies** are extremely toxic to our feline friends. In fact, they are so toxic, they should never be in the same environment as a cat.

Even a small ingested piece of this plant could lead to sudden kidney failure. Other toxic plants that may still be in your home from the holidays include **poinsettias, holly and mistletoe**.

- **Salt.** Salt can be harmful to our pets in two ways. First, **rock salt** that is put on the streets and sidewalks to melt ice can be very irritating to our pets' feet. Secondly, the ingestion of large quantities of salt can cause life-threatening brain swelling. **Homemade play dough** is a common source of excessive salt, if ingested.
- **Antifreeze.** This is a true winter risk. Many folks are changing and topping off their car radiator fluid with antifreeze, which can spill on the ground. Just a small ingested amount of this fluid can cause kidney failure in both cats and dogs.
- **Frostbite and hypothermia.** Pets who have not been conditioned to extremely cold weather can succumb quickly to hypothermia when left outside in freezing temperatures. Outdoor cats might climb into car engines to keep warm but can get severely burned or cut by fan blades when the engine is started again. Keep your pets inside when it's cold outside.
- Cold and damp weather can aggravate arthritis in dogs and cats. Never medicate your pet with human anti-inflammatory medication! One **Tylenol™** tablet can kill a cat as well as make dogs very sick, and pain relieving doses of **aspirin or ibuprofen** can lead to life-threatening stomach ulcers in dogs and cats. Arthritic pets need exercise, well-padded bedding and need to be kept warm. A veterinarian should be consulted for safer pain relieving medications, if needed.

By knowing the risks and necessary precautions, it's easy to keep your pet and family safe and healthy for through the winter and New Year!