

Pets and Snow Related Falls

Dog and cat ownership is increasing in the United States in concert with a rising population of older persons, in whom injuries might have the greatest health consequences. According to the data from the CDC and the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System All Injury Program, an average of 86,629 Americans visit emergency rooms each year due to falls caused by pets. 88% of these falls involved dogs and 12% were cat-related. Walking dogs and chasing pets were associated with the greatest number of injuries, although details about the circumstances surrounding these falls were limited. And, the risks for fall injuries with pet-human interactions increases as frosty weather and snow compound the walking routines of many pet owners.

Examine your yearly routine to prepare yourself and your pet for mutual safety. There are many winter hazards out there, such as antifreeze spills, uneven terrain, snow drifts and ice patches that can cause you and your pet to take a spill. Use these cold weather tips for safety this winter:

- When walking your dog near ice, use extra caution to avoid slipping. Do not allow your dog to run across frozen bodies of water. Your pet could fall into icy water if the ice is too thin! If this happens, do not go out on the ice after the pet. You could fall in too. Call the fire department or 911 for rescue.
- Do not leave your dog outside unsupervised without a heated shelter. Even though your dog has fur, it does not mean it can withstand the cold. Although some dog breeds (Huskies and Malamutes) are better suited to cold weather, all dogs should have access to a warm shelter at all times. When you walk your dog in the winter, be on the lookout for frostbite. White patches on his feet and or on your face are the beginnings of frostbite.
- There are lots of dangers on the streets in the wintertime. Be certain your pet doesn't come in contact with antifreeze that may have leaked out of a vehicle (lime green colored). Even one taste can be fatal. And, use pet friendly antifreeze in your vehicle and double check to make sure your vehicle doesn't leak. You can also slip and fall in antifreeze spills in your driveway.
- Avoid letting your dog eat snow or anything else on the ground. Dangerous chemicals may be hidden in the snow. If you are uncertain what may be under a pile of snow, try to walk around it. Statistics have shown that hazards can be buried under snow causing unsuspected fall hazards for you and your pet.
- If you must walk in the dark hours of winter, carry a flashlight, extra batteries, and a water bottle. If you have a cell phone, take that too. Whether it's an emergency for yourself or another person, you will be able to contact resources for assistance.
- Write snow boots or other footgear that can grip in snow and ice conditions. Tennis shoes, loafers, or golf shoes are not waterproof or insulated enough to protect your feet and ensure stability. If you are required to walk on ice, lightly coat your pet's feet with Vaseline as an extra buffer against frostbite.

Walking your pet in winter weather can be beautiful, but make it safe!