

Northwoods Humane Society – Susan Horrocks
ANTIFREEZE. GOOD FOR YOUR PIPES - NOT FOR YOUR PETS

Before we talk about antifreeze – please remember not to let your dogs run – especially if you are near water. The lakes are not safe and we are aware of a recent dog drowning. It looks safe to the dog but that isn't always the case.

Just about everybody in Wisconsin has gone through different stages of winterizing. We got our warm clothes out of storage and packed the shorts away for next summer. We've mulched our gardens and stocked up on bird seed, and we're also getting our boats, RV's and cabins ready for winter and that often means flushing their mechanical systems with antifreeze to protect them from the sub zero temperatures that will be arriving all too soon.

Antifreeze is great for that. Most antifreezes are chemical compounds made to be added to water to reduce the freezing point. Reducing the freezing point lessens the likelihood of the water turning to ice which can expand and damage the pipe or system you're trying to protect. In fact, some anti-freezes can prevent freezing to -87 degrees. So, from that standpoint antifreeze is a hardworking helper and if you look in your garage you probably have a gallon or two. I just went out to our garage just now and found five gallons sitting right inside the door.

Of the antifreeze solutions, ethylene glycol-based antifreeze has been around a long time and is broadly used because its higher boiling points work in summer as well as winter. And while all the varieties of antifreeze compounds are toxic to some degree, ethylene glycol antifreeze is extremely harmful and potentially deadly when ingested. To make matters worse, if dogs or cats find a puddle of antifreeze, they're likely to drink it because antifreeze has a sweet taste that dogs and cats find quite tasty.

Once antifreeze has been ingested and depending upon the quantity that has been consumed, it causes kidney failure that is often fatal in just a few days. Even very small amounts cause death; about five tablespoons can kill a medium sized dog and cats, just licking it off their paws, can die from it. Signs of antifreeze poisoning in animals may be depression, staggering, seizures, excessive thirst, urinating large amounts of water and vomiting. In the end, it would be kidney failure that takes them from us and we would never want our pets – or us - to suffer that loss.

An informative article titled "Antifreeze Poisoning" can be found online at www.vetmed.wsu.edu/cliented/antifreeze.aspx. The author is a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and she did her study in Minnesota so she's well versed on winter and our winterizing habits. Like most people who devote their lives to caring for animals, she said she's glad we're making this information available and generously offered its content for our use. As she commented, "Some of my most heartbreaking cases are those animals that died from antifreeze poisoning – because it's preventable".

This is not a happy topic but what they say about "an ounce of prevention" is certainly true in this case. In that spirit, let's make sure our basements and garages are safe for our animals, starting by eliminating the chance of them getting into antifreeze. Here's what you can do:

- Take care to keep both new and used antifreeze in a sealed container, out of reach of pets.
- Check driveways for any puddles of antifreeze that may have leaked from the car. Clean up any spills of antifreeze on driveways and other hard surfaces.
- Take used antifreeze to a service station for disposal – don't pour it on the road.
- Investigate the use of alternative antifreeze products that are less toxic to pets.
Propylene glycol-based antifreeze is another type of antifreeze solution that is sometimes labeled as “non-toxic”, however; while it may be less toxic it should not be considered safe for consumption.
- In some places it is permissible to pour moderate amounts down the toilet. If you do so, make sure the lid is down and the door to the room is closed.

If you see your pet drinking antifreeze or are at all suspicious that your pet may have gotten into it, contact a veterinarian immediately. Antifreeze itself is not very toxic but it is broken down by the liver into other components that cause the damage. Treatment for antifreeze poisoning needs to be started as soon after ingestion as possible to be effective, and the earlier the treatment is started, the greater chance for survival. Treatment includes inducing vomiting if the pet is seen within a few hours or administering a drug that impairs the liver from converting the antifreeze to other toxic products, allowing the unconverted antifreeze to pass in the urine. This drug treatment is only useful when given early and unfortunately is not effective after the pet is already showing signs of kidney damage.

The best way to dispose of unused or waste antifreeze is to first call a recycling center near you and describe the type of antifreeze you wish to get rid of. They'll help you determine how to dispose of it safely and legally. Used antifreeze may also contain levels of dissolved heavy metals that can be toxic to animal life and may contaminate soils and sediments. So, do not pour used antifreeze into sewers, on the ground, or into floor drains.

Our local veterinary offices are well aware of the hazards of antifreeze (and rat poison – another thorny topic) and they are, as always, on hand to help if a pet problem arises. Let's try to make their lives easier and our pets safer by educating ourselves and others in our households about dangerous substances, starting with antifreeze.

Happy winterizing!

Dates to save: December 3 – My Villa - Shopping for NHS – 10 am to 4 p.m.

December 3 – NHS Bake Sale at Hayward High School 9 am to 3 p.m.