

ANTIFREEZE POISONING - PETS

Every year, by some estimates, about 10,000 dogs and cats are victims of accidental poisoning by automobile antifreeze. Antifreeze has a sweet taste that is appealing to dogs and it only takes a small dose of antifreeze to be lethal. A pet does not have to drink a lot of antifreeze to be poisoned. Antifreeze is deadly to dogs and other animals. A small amount left on the ground can prove to be disastrous to man's best friend if he happens to lap it up. Even a few licks of this sweet-tasting liquid can be fatal to a cat or dog. (Ethylene- glycol-based antifreeze is also extremely hazardous to children. A few ounces are lethal.) For a medium sized dog, ingestion of about 2 ounces (3-4 tablespoons) is toxic. For cats, as little as 1/4 of an ounce (1-2 teaspoons) can be lethal.

Most brands of commercial antifreeze consist of 95 percent ethylene glycol, an extremely toxic chemical. Antifreeze poisoning commonly occurs in spring and fall when car owners replace the old antifreeze with fresh antifreeze in their car radiators. However, poisoning can happen anytime, particularly when a car boils over or when a hose leaks, releasing the antifreeze. As mentioned above, this poisoning happens often to animals who are allowed to roam freely in their neighborhoods, but another high risk group are those dogs who are confined in garages and who may not always be provided with adequate fresh drinking water. These dogs may gain access to improperly or inadequately stored antifreeze or lick spilled or leaked antifreeze off the garage floor. If it is necessary to confine your pet(s) to your garage, make sure antifreeze containers are well secured and your animal has plenty of fresh water.

Both cats and dog are attracted to the smell and taste of ethylene glycol. Therefore, when changing or adding antifreeze to your car care should be taken to avoid spilling any or allowing any to remain in a puddle on the ground. Be sure to collect all of the waste coolant and properly dispose of it. And never leave a bucket of ethylene-glycol coolant unattended - even for a moment. Empty antifreeze containers and any rags used should be disposed of properly and containers of antifreeze should be wiped clean and stored out of the reach of pets. Also remember that your car can leak coolant at any time. If you see a puddle of greenish or orange-colored liquid in your driveway, flush the area with plenty of water and don't delay locating and fixing the leak. Another method of quick clean-up is to spread cat litter on the spill, clean up with rags (which are bagged immediately) and then rinse. Antifreeze will biodegrade in the environment, but it takes weeks or months to do so, so removing the spill is absolutely essential.

ANTIFREEZE POISONING OCCURS IN TWO STAGES:

STAGE 1: In the first stage, the ethylene glycol in the antifreeze causes a drunken appearance in the animal. Initial symptoms of antifreeze poisoning include staggering, unsteady on the feet, lack of coordination, apparent disorientation, tremors, thirst, frequent urination and vomiting. The animal may appear listless and depressed. Because early signs of antifreeze poisoning often mimic signs of other illness, neither you nor your veterinarian may suspect antifreeze poisoning until it is too late. Fortunately, in house lab tests performed by your veterinarian assist in the diagnosis of antifreeze toxicity. These symptoms can begin as soon as 30

minutes after the antifreeze has been ingested and may last for 12 hours at which time the symptoms will disappear and the animal appears to recover.

Getting the dog to a veterinarian is critical within the first 9-12 hours following ingestion. After that length of time, the liver will have already begun metabolizing the ethylene glycol into substances that cause kidney failure and ultimately death.

STAGE 2: At this point, the dog's liver begins metabolizing, or breaking down the ethylene glycol, the active ingredient in antifreeze, changing it into more toxic substances. Further symptoms may not be noticeable for days and irreparable damage may be occurring. Vomiting may reoccur, as well as loss of appetite, dehydration, inability to urinate, salivation, seizures, and mouth ulcers. Within 12 to 36 hours of ingestion, the toxic substances will reach such a level that the dog's kidneys stop functioning, and the animal slips into a coma and death.

If you see or suspect your dog has ingested antifreeze, take your animal to your Veterinarian immediately. If your dog has proper treatment within the crucial first 12 hours, complete recovery is possible. In order to prevent the ethylene glycol from being absorbed into the liver, the Vet will administer an IV of ethanol which counters the effect of the deadly ethylene glycol.

Another source of help is the National Poison Control Center, 800-548- 2423.