

Animal Groups Offer Advice in Preparation for Halloween

Pet owners urged to prevent cats and dogs from getting spooked.

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Being prepared is one way experts say that pet owners can keep cats and dogs safe on Halloween. Before dressing an animal in a costume, animal groups and trainers offer several guidelines.

Pet owners should think twice about dog costumes, according to dog training company Bark Busters. While some dogs might like being dressed up, it's wise to experiment first to see if a pet likes to be in costume. If an animal shows resistance, don't do it, they say.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals advises pet owners to be aware of Halloween-related products and activities that can be dangerous to cats and dogs. For example, sweets are toxic to pets. Candy wrappers, which cats like to play with, can be ingested and cause intestinal blockage and induce vomiting, the ASPCA says.

Another potential danger on Halloween is an increased potential for dog bites, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. If a dog is apprehensive about costumes and excited children, pet owners need to be aware and make preparations before Halloween to keep their dog and children safe, says James Cook, AVMA president.

"If your dog gets nervous when the doorbell rings, put the dog in a place where it will feel safe," Cook says, such as a crate with a toy or a familiar room with the door closed.

The ASPCA offers the following trick-free Halloween tips:

Decorations can be dangerous. Rethink placing candles in jack-o-lanterns. Pets can easily knock them over and start a fire. Curious kittens are particularly at risk of getting burned by candle flames.

Careful with costumes. Make sure pet costumes do not limit an animal's movement, hearing, sight or ability to breathe or bark. Also check the costume for choking hazards. An alternative to dressing your pet from head to paw: a simple, festive Halloween bandana.

Watch out for chocolate. Chocolate, especially baker's and dark chocolate can be potentially poisonous to animals, especially dogs. So can the artificial sweetener xylitol. A small amount of xylitol sweetener can cause sudden drop in blood sugar, which leads to depression, lack of coordination and seizures. Symptoms of significant chocolate ingestion may include vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity and increased thirst, urination and heart rate and even seizures.

In addition, pet owners are urged not to leave their animals outside, to check ID tags just in case and to offer reassurance on Halloween.