

Animal Group Offers Halloween Advice

Pet owners urged to take measures to keep cats and dogs from getting frightened.

Posted Oct. 30, 2008, 3 a.m. EDT

Halloween can be a spooky time for cats. Take precautions - like keeping your cat indoors and making sure he has his ID tag on - to ensure a safe holiday. Being prepared is one way experts say that pet owners can keep cats and dogs safe on Halloween.

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. It is not advisable for cats to wear costumes. An alternative to dressing your pet from head to paw: a simple, festive Halloween-colored bandana or collar. 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 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. Cats - black ones in particular - often fall victim to pranks. Keep cats indoors. Use fake cobwebs sparingly outdoors. These may adversely affect pets and wildlife. Provide your pets some extra attention to relieve them of Halloween stress. Keep a supply of pet treats handy and reach for one before you open the door for trick-or-treaters. If your pets can sit calmly while the door is open, give them a treat. Don't let pets chew or eat items like crepe-paper streamers - these are often colored with water-soluble dyes that will discolor your pets' mouth and can cause upset stomachs.