

Liquid Potpourri Dangerous to Cats

Poison control center warns that oils in products can cause skin irritation and other problems.

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Before setting out that delicious-smelling potpourri simmer pot, take heed: Many liquid potpourris contain oils and detergents that could prove hazardous to cats, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (ASPCA's) Animal Poison Control Center.

The essential oils found in many potpourri products can cause irritations to the skin, gastrointestinal tract and mucous membranes, according to the ASPCA veterinary toxicologist and senior vice president Steven Hansen. More significant injuries are typically a result of thermal burns or exposure to a type of detergent called cationics.

"Where there is contact with the skin, redness, swelling and extremely painful lesions can appear," Hansen said.

Symptoms of these exposures in cats include drooling, vomiting, depression, metabolic disturbances and difficulty breathing from fluid on the lungs.

Although 10 percent of the liquid potpourri poisoning cases managed by the ASPCA since 2001 have included life-threatening effects, most animals make a full recovery if treated promptly.

"However, it is important to note that treatment can be very extensive and may involve a lengthy hospitalization," Hansen said.

Cats are more likely to be at risk than other animals, Hansen says, because cats have easier access to the simmer pots, which are usually kept on countertops or other high-level surfaces. Many exposures occur when cats lap up heated liquid from the simmer pot or when liquid spills on their fur from a leaky container.

To avoid exposing your pet to the dangers of liquid potpourri, the Poison Control Center suggests placing potpourri simmer pots and unused liquid in rooms where pets cannot gain access; and consider using safer alternatives, such as plug-in or solid air fresheners.

If you suspect your pet has been exposed to liquid potpourri, call a veterinarian or the Poison Control Center's emergency hotline at (888) 426-4435.