

N.J. Legislation to Add Bittering Agent to Antifreeze

Bill intends to keep cats, dogs from ingesting the sweet-tasting fluid.

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A New Jersey antifreeze bittering bill that would require an additive to mask the sweet taste of the product sold in the state intends to lower the risk of poisonings and deaths in pets and children. Most major antifreeze brands contain ethylene glycol, a deadly toxin.

Senate Bill 979 calls for a bittering agent, denatonium benzoate, to be added to antifreeze containing more than 10 percent ethylene glycol. The additive would change the taste and no longer attract cats and dogs to the fluid.

The Veterinary School at Washington State University estimates the annual number of cat and dog antifreeze poisonings at 10,000. From those 10,000 cases, the majority result in death if animals don't get immediate veterinary treatment.

In most incidents, pets are exposed to antifreeze when a car leaks the fluid. For example, a cat might walk over a puddle of antifreeze then lick its paws. It's also used to intentionally poison animals, including feral cats.

According to statistics compiled by the American Association of Poison Control Centers, approximately 1,400 children ingest antifreeze each year. Countries that have already adopted the addition of a denatonium benzoate additive include Japan, Australia and the United Kingdom.

During the past 15 years in the United States, similar legislation has been approved in Oregon, California, New Mexico, Arizona and Maine.