

Six Ways to Keep Your Pet Safe at Home

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Pet Experts Offer Six Ways to Keep Your Pet Safe at Home

KING, NC — OCTOBER 23, 2007 — Not many pet owners have the luxury of being able to keep their pets under watch all the time. It seems that it's those times when we are away that the animals around our homes fall into the greatest mischief or danger – or both.

There are a number of steps that pet owners can take – some simple and others that require a bit more planning – to help ensure pets are safe around the home when pet owners are not there. Pet Sitters International offers these six tips for keeping your pet safe:

- 1. One person's trash...** Dogs and cats alike seem to love the smell, taste and texture of trash, and they will go out of their way to play in that arena while you're away. The problem is many things in our trash that may seem benign to us can be dangerous to pets, including chicken bones, which are choking hazards because of their brittle nature. Take all the trash outside when you leave for any length of time, or place trashcans out of reach of your pets.
- 2. Do sweat the small stuff.** Remove small toys, string and other choking hazards such as rubber bands from your pet's area in your home. They may love these things as toys, but the risk of choking is high. Consider, too, if your pet's toys are sized appropriately for him. A ball meant for a smaller animal can lodge within a larger one's throat.
- 3. Holiday cheer means even more risk.** Halloween, Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays bring more than cheer to your home. The influx of candy, ornaments and shiny objects will capture your pet's attention and imagination quickly. Remember that chocolate is poisonous to most small animals and that tinsel and Christmas tree ornaments can harm your pet in a very short length of time. Popular plants including poinsettias, mistletoe and holly are poisonous as well. Be extra vigilant during these times for your pet's sake.
- 4. Eight lives and counting.** Cats aren't always as nimble footed and self sufficient as legend has it. Check for places where they can become stuck, such as behind the refrigerator or in fireplace openings, and seal up those openings. Close all toilet lids before you leave the house. Finally, put away those toys you may enjoy with your feline friend that include strings. Left alone with one, your animal can quickly choke.
- 5. An idle mind is the devil's workshop.** Pets enjoy their routines. And if you're going to be away for an extended period of time, or if you're going to be away at times of the day when you're usually at home with your pet, consider hiring a professional pet sitter to help your pet stick to its schedule. It is reassuring to the pet, and can help alleviate some of the mischievous exploring that often leads to disaster. A good pet sitter knows how to think like a pet and can quickly scan your pet's environment for known dangers.

Before hiring a sitter for your pet, make sure the pet sitter is bonded and carries adequate liability insurance. Finding a pet sitter who is accredited through a national association like PSI is also a real plus. Be sure to make time for a face-to-face interview in your home with the sitter and your pets. Conducting an initial interview is an excellent time for you to check credentials and ask important questions.

6. Disaster and emergency planning can save the day. All pet owners should have a disaster plan and kit for each of their pets. According to Jennifer Miler of St. Petersburg, Florida, Pet Sitters International's 2007 Pet Sitter of the Year™, "Natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods, as well as unforeseen man-made disasters like chemical spills, can close off a residential area in short order. The key is to be prepared as best as you can, and it only takes a small amount of preparation."

Your emergency kit should include names and addresses of three people (one outside of your area code) to call in case there's an emergency and you can't make it to your home. Also to be included are a crate for each animal, medicines and medical records.

You should be able to pass the "five-minute preparedness test," meaning in five minutes or fewer, you should be able to get your pets and their emergency kit out of your home at any moment. Finally, this kit should be located in a visible and obvious place in your home, in case you are incapacitated and another person is entering your home to rescue your pets.

Keeping your pet safe while you're away starts with the small, obvious things, then moves quickly into more complex and serious issues. A little bit of sleuth work around your home, reaching out to experts for advice and assistance, and finally, some worst-case scenario thinking and preparation can help you keep your pet safe.

About Pet Sitters International

Established in 1994, Pet Sitters International (PSI) is the world's largest educational association for professional pet sitters, representing more than 7,900 independent professional pet-sitting businesses in the United States, Canada and abroad. PSI prides itself on its ability to provide its members with access to affordable bonding and liability insurance and educational resources such as PSI's Accreditation Program, *The WORLD of Professional Pet Sitting* magazine, *The Pet Owner's WORLD* magazine and PSI's annual *Quest* convention.