

## HOLIDAY HAZARDS

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Each and every holiday season we see preventable injuries, poisonings, illnesses, and even harmful, unwanted deaths in our pets. The causes are many, but most are due to all the different things that we introduce into our homes. These issues do not affect only dogs and cats, but also include the pet birds, ferrets, rabbits, pocket pets and wildlife too. When we decorate our homes and yards, we usually don't stop to think of all the hazards to animals that our activities bring about. We often load up our houses with the many toxic and beautiful species of plants available at this time of year. We hook up multiple twinkling and colorful electric lights with long loose strings of wire attached, and have them plugged in all over the place. There is often a tree with fascinating dangling things within reach just begging to be touched. There is lot of confusion with schedules, and relatives and company coming over, big feet and little feet all over the place. The list is endless, so we'll just start going through the list from top to bottom.

Sometimes that old adage about Murphy's Law just ought to be paid attention to. For sure, if you initiate a thought in your mind that something may be amiss or might be a problem, then act on it right away. That is your inner vision just screaming at you to be proactive, and eliminate a potential hazard before it happens.

Let's start with that tree. Cats love to climb right? It is irresistible, especially for young cats, to get up there and bat at all those ornaments. If it isn't a hazard to the cat, it will be to all your breakables. They may loosen or fray the wires or even worse, knock the tree over and cause a fire. Cats may try to chew on ornaments, tinsel or the wires, and all the pet birds definitely will ruin whatever they can get to, as well as young dogs, rabbits, and ferrets closer to the floor. It is a sad day indeed to go through an electrocution event with any beloved pet. They are often unsavable. Ferrets will chew and swallow about anything they can find that has rubber or plastic in it. Puppies are big foreign material eaters as well. How can we ask our pet birds not to beg to go into that tree and chew up things? It's un-birdlike to not try to do that. A lot of us will light candles during our various ceremonies. Burned hair, feathers, spilled hot wax all over, or worse yet that slowly smoldering dangerous house fire.

There's a lot of cooking, hot stoves and fireplace use this time of year. The odors and warmth are attractive to many pets. Birds will light on or in the soup (or even the open toilet lid for that matter). They all may jump onto something hot or try to get into cooked food dishes within reach.

Moving trains, ornaments, figurines and the like are just more temptation than most pets can bear.

Now for a big issue, that of the toxic plants. The pets will try to drink from the tree stand; this fluid may contain deadly chemicals. They may nibble on the fake snow flocking that falls onto the floor. The triumvirate of poinsettia, mistletoe and holly are all some of the most toxic of all house oriented plants. Keep them all away from nibbling or ingesting

any of these plants, as they are irresistible until too much has been eaten. The damage can vary from a burned throat all the way to liver and kidney failure. Don't forget the various bulbs we bring in to force in cold months. They are all highly toxic as well. In fact there aren't too many pet friendly houseplants at all.

The next big potential problem is pets getting into our foods. If they raid the uncooked meat and veggies, well then more power to them, as they won't be bothered by that as much as we are. The sugar, baked goods, candies, and chocolate are a different matter. They may just get a little innocent dextrose high, or may be sickened with chocolate poisoning. Doughy goods can swell within their stomach and cause a lot of gas. All the creamy dips are irresistible, and could cause nausea and vomiting. Don't forget that avocado in any form is toxic to smaller pet birds and could kill them. Larger amounts of cooked meats left out are asking for the dog and cat to party too. Expect big cleanups, from both ends after these raids. Don't forget the milk and cookies left out for Santa, and the carrots left for the reindeer. Pets love to get into these too and make a mess of things. Gift giving is fun from the wrapping to the opening. Don't forget our pets like to get into gifts too. Those ribbons and bows are just fascinating toys. They can also become nooses that can seriously hurt an animal, or even worse. There's nothing funnier to watch than a pair of ferrets or a dog ripping apart the wrapping around the gifts of a new toy. Just make sure its safe for them, and that they don't open up all your things as well. Pets think the whole thing was decorated for them in the first place. They have such fickle boundaries.

What about those wild critters outside? We invade their little safe havens with decorations and lights, and make it difficult to find their old roosting, and feeding spots around our homes. It is also easier to get tangled up in loose strings of wire. Make sure you provide them with extra food at feeders located away from the decorated areas. So what can you do to make the plans and preparations of this time of year stay light, cheerful, and safe for all the critters in the house? Remember what we said about being proactive. Well you've read this article, now look around you. Are the animals allowed to be wherever they want to be, unsupervised by people? Are their nails trimmed, can they fly? Are things neat and tidy, and put up high or at least out of reach? Are you too busy, get side-tracked easily? Will there be parties with lots of people? This is the time to put the pets to bed early, or secure them in their crates, and other protected safe havens. Watch them carefully and enjoy yourselves. It truly is the season to be jollier, we all deserve it, and certainly need more of that. Keeping our pets safe will only add to that. The happiest holiday greetings from all of us to all of you!