

Avoid Cold Weather Hazards for Pets

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ANNAPOLIS, MD – As colder temperatures arrive this winter, the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) is reminding animal owners to plan for cold, dangerous conditions that may impact the health and well-being of their pets and livestock.

“Pets and livestock throughout the state can be negatively impacted by severe winter weather,” said Dr. Jo Chapman, MDA Acting State Veterinarian. “Both pets and livestock react to these harsh conditions so owners must plan ahead and take the extra steps necessary to ensure the health and safety of their animals.”

Maryland law requires owners provide an adequate supply of feed and water for their animals, as well as shelter from the wind and other severe conditions. Precautions for livestock include:

- Ensuring access to clean water that is not frozen
- Increasing feed to provide energy which helps animals stay warm
- Providing shelter such as barns, forests, and hills to allow animals to escape wind and heavy snow
- Caution around icy areas to prevent falls and injuries
- Taking care while hauling livestock in icy winter weather

As a reminder, dogs, cats, and other companion animals that live inside homes may not be able to tolerate outdoor winter temperatures for long periods of time. Guardian dogs and barn cats that live outside still need dry, clean, enclosed spaces such as dog or cat houses that help retain body heat. Winter precautions for companion animals include ensuring:

- Access to clean, unfrozen water
- Adequate feed
- Dry, clean shelter - such as dog houses for guard dogs (and/or limit time outdoors)
- Good grooming
- Protection from de-icing chemicals, which can irritate skin
- Protection from antifreeze, which tastes sweet to animals, but is extremely toxic
- Proper collar or identification such as a tag or microchip. Ask your veterinarian to scan the microchip and make sure it is working at each visit.