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[Home](#) / [Niche](#) / [Neighborhood Extra](#) / [News](#)

Smoking around pets puts them at risk

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The Great American Smokeout is Thursday, Nov. 20. This is a great opportunity to help smokers to go smoke-free for the day, and aim for a smoke-free lifetime.

Smoking is a hard addiction to break. Would it make it easier to stop if

one knew the dangers that smoking causes to our animal companions? Smoking around your pets will put them at risk.

There is no safe level of exposure to second- or third-hand smoke for

humans or animals. A recent study shows that nearly 30% of pet

owners live with at least one smoker. Animals exposed to smoke suffer respiratory problems, allergies, and even nasal and lung cancer in dogs and lymphoma in cats.

The ASPCA, one of the largest animal rights groups in America, lists tobacco smoke as a toxin that is dangerous to pets. Unfortunately, companion animals cannot escape from this danger. Over time, this exposure can cause serious health concerns. It may take a longer time to see these issues, and by

then it is too late.

A 2002 Tufts University study linked second-hand smoke to cancer in cats.

It showed that cats living with smokers are twice as likely to develop malignant lymphoma. This kills 3 out of 4 cats within 12 months. A 2007 University of Minnesota study also showed cats in smoking households have nicotine and other toxins in their urine. Cats are especially at risk because of their grooming habits. They pick up the toxins from the smoke when licking their fur.

A 1998 Colorado State University study found a higher incidences of nasal tumors and cancer of the sinus in dogs living in a home with smokers, compared to those living in a smoke-free environment. This type of tumor was specifically found among long-nosed breeds. Dogs with nasal cancer usually

do not survive more than a year. Lung cancer is greater among short- to medium-nosed dogs, such as boxers and bulldogs. Their shorter nasal passages make it easier for cancer-causing particles to reach the lungs.

Birds are also at risk in smoking households. Their respiratory systems are hypersensitive to any type of airborne pollutant. Exposure to smoke can cause pneumonia and lung cancer, as well as eye, skin, heart and fertility problems.

Smoking around pets can lead to other problems as well. An animal ingesting a cigarette butt can be poisoned by high levels of nicotine and other toxins. Thirsty animals drinking water with butts in it can be poisoned this way. Other types of tobacco such as snuff, or replacement gum and patches can be hazardous to animals.

If you think your animal has ingested any of the above, contact your vet immediately. Signs of poisoning are tremors, twitching, or seizures, drooling, constricted pupils, heart rate changes, vomiting and diarrhea.

To minimize risk while working to become smoke-free, smoke only outside. Change your clothes, and wash them right away. Wash your hands before petting your animal. Use a high quality air filter in your home. Keep ashtrays clean, and dispose butts properly. Working to quit will help everyone's health, and that money saved can be spent on treats, toys and food!

Coalition for Pet Protection is a local animal welfare organization founded in 1992. CPP is a 501(c)(3) group whose donations are tax deductible and used locally. More information is on Facebook and at www.petcoalition.org.

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