

Ice Melt Hazards and Your Pet



by Dr. Ted Purcell

With the freeze and thaw of spring comes the formation of ice on sidewalks. The presence of ice on walkways creates a situation where our pets may become exposed to ice melts. Ice melts come in a variety of formulations and may contain ingredients such as sodium chloride, potassium chloride, magnesium chloride, and calcium carbonate. Urea is the common ingredient in “pet safe” ice melts. All ice melt products should be considered a hazard to your pet’s health.



Skin exposure to an ice melt product may occur by a dog or cat walking on a surface that has been treated with ice melt. Ingestion of ice melt may occur when a pet cleans its paws that have been exposed to the ice melt. Ice melt granules carried into the home on footwear may be another source of ingestion. As well as any open containers or bags of ice melt stored inside the home.

Ice melt products can be irritating to the skin and cause signs such as redness and persistent licking of the paws. Ingestion of ice melt products can cause a variety of signs depending on the type and amount of ice melt ingested. Signs may include excessive drooling, lethargy, vomiting, diarrhea, and disorientation. Most cases of ice melt exposure result in mild signs of skin irritation and digestive upset. However the potential exists for serious health effects to develop depending on the type and quantity of ice melt ingested. If your pet has been exposed to an ice melt product please call the Hermitage Veterinary Hospital immediately for information and assistance.

Prevention is the best way to avoid exposure of your pet to ice melt products. Avoid walking your pet in areas where ice melt has been applied. Pet “booties” can be used to protect the feet from the effects of ice melts. Foot cremes and balms are commercially available and marketed as an aid to protect feet from the irritating effects of ice melt. If your pet has walked on an ice melt treated surface rinse its feet off with warm water to remove the ice melt from the skin before it is ingested. Clean up any granules of ice melt that may get carried into the home on footwear. And be sure to securely store any container of ice melt in the household so that a curious pet does not have access to its contents.

Have a safe and happy spring with your pets !

Dr. Ted Purcell