

Humane Officer's Corner by Jill Posanski

Animals in Extreme Weather conditions:

Weather extremes generate many calls to Waukesha County's humane office. When the temperatures reach hot or cold extremes, anything living outside is challenged to survive. Mother Nature thus has the most vigorous survivors create the next generation.

Domestic animals, both pets and livestock, have had humans interfere with their genetic make-up. By breeding for specific traits, like non-shedding or maximum milk production, we have unknowingly altered other traits. In this way, some domestic animals have had the genetics to survive weather extremes bred out of them. The Chihuahua, as an example, has too little body mass and not enough hair coat to ever survive outside in a Wisconsin winter.

For a multitude of reasons, I advocate for pets to live inside with their people. Indoor pets have many more opportunities for social stimulation than those in a kennel or outbuilding. Our pets are social creatures that thrive on those interactions. Health and behavior issues would likely be noticed and addressed sooner in an indoor pet.

That being said, it is not against the law to keep pets outside year-round. Wisconsin state statutes require owners to provide adequate shelter that will protect the animal from sunlight and inclement weather. Breed, nutrition, age, and physical wellbeing all affect an animal's ability to tolerate weather extremes. An animal's body, if healthy, will respond to daylight getting shorter starting in late June and longer in late December. Less hours of daylight dictate when they put on a layer of fatty insulation and grow a thick, winter hair coat. Longer daylight signals the animal's body to shed out that warm coat. If a healthy, "outside-appropriate" animal has access to an insulated, weatherproof shelter and has been acclimated to the weather, it can be fine out in even the nastiest stuff. Pets accustomed to outside weather actually get overheated coming into a warm home. During a severe cold snap, a good animal husbandry practice is to bring the pets into a draft-free, unheated garage with something insulating the floor on which they can rest.

Animals acclimate to heat in the same way; gradually. A shaded area, a place to get out of the rain and a large bowl of water is usually enough to keep outside pets comfortable. The humane calls we receive on hot days are usually dogs or cats in parked vehicles. This is a deadly emergency. Cars can get up over 100 degrees in just a few minutes if conditions are right. Animals cannot cool themselves by panting if they are breathing the hot air in a vehicle. (My guideline: if it is over 65 degrees F outside, my critters do not get to run errands with me.) Waukesha County humane officers have a response plan in place for "hotdog" emergencies. I will share those details in a newsletter due to come out when it turns warmer. The point I want to emphasize here is that not everyone chooses to allow their pets indoors. If pets are introduced to outdoor life gradually and provided for properly, most do okay.

The time to call a humane or police officer is when you believe an animal to be in danger from exposure to extreme weather. This means the animal is not suited by breed to live outside, looks very thin, has matted fur all over its body, has no access to shelter, or is not given water daily. We had an owner who

tied out their dog for a potty break during a bitterly cold snap. They forgot the dog was outside for over an hour. They were glad we came knocking after an observer gave us a call. The dog was fine, and happy to be back in the home.

Stay warm and keep your critters safe!