**Critter Corner: Holiday Safety Tips**

**Happy Holidays to everyone from the barnyard staff and critters! This time of year, it is always good to have a few safety reminders, in order to keep all members of your family safe – including those that wear fur, scales or feathers.**

***Here are a few basic tips:***

* **Plants can be poisonous to pets, so be mindful of any holiday bouquets, plants or other arrangements that may peak your animal’s interest but be dangerous if consumed. For example: flowers in the lily family – if eaten or even brushed up against – are dangerous to cats. Cats are naturally drawn to greenery and flowers, so please research the flower/plant before putting it in reach of your furry friends.**
* **Tinsel, ribbons and other such stringed items can cause abdominal blockages, bleeding &/or other medical complications if consumed by animals. These items can be on packages under the tree, decorations on the tree or around the house, or even on sweaters and other clothing. Years ago, I had visitors stay with me for a few days. After they left, my cat stopped eating and going to the bathroom. X-rays revealed that he had an abdominal blockage of some sort. After emergency gastro-intestinal surgery, the vet discovered the culprit: it was the little plastic piece from a hooded jacket that keeps the drawstring from retreating into the hood. It was a very expensive and painful lesson for all involved, especially my cat!**
* **Concentrated chocolate can kill pets if eaten! Dogs and cats are curious and may eat whatever they come across. Chocolate chips and chocolate bars are examples of concentrated chocolate that can make an animal really sick or, in extreme cases, even kill the animal. The holiday season is loaded with many very sweet and tasty treats. These treats, though, can be very dangerous to our beloved critters, so please be mindful of what you leave lying around, in reach of your cat or dog. It is a good idea to buy an extra bag of animal-appropriate treats, so that when your critter is begging for a treat, he or she can be rewarded with something safe and healthy to eat.**
* **Candles can cause burns to pets &/or fires to your home. Never leave a candle burning unattended! Even when you are around, it can still be dangerous to your pet. Again, I will use myself as the example. Last year, I had a holiday candle burning on top of the stove, while a friend was visiting me. As we conversed at the table, I started to smell burning hair. I looked over at the candle a few feet away and saw that one of my cats had jumped up onto the stove. He was leaning over the burning candle to see outside the window behind the stove. The sight nearly gave me a heart attack, I can tell you! I jumped up and grabbed my cat and immediately doused him with water in the sink. My poor cat did not know what had happened – just that he got a surprise bath! Fortunately, he had just managed to singe the very end hairs on his belly but…it certainly could have turned tragic had I not been sitting right there to deal with the situation. So, please learn from my example and be extra mindful of candles, even when you are in the presence of the candle.**

**The holiday season is one to be enjoyed with family and friends. When we focus on safety for both people and animals, we can prevent a joyous time from turning tragic. We wish you all many blessings for safety, happiness, healthfulness, prosperity and peace. Happy Holidays!**