

Pets in Cars

We have all seen the dog with his head hanging out of the window, ears flapping in the wind; this is the epitome of the happy dog. But not all dogs are so happy in the car. There are unknown dangers for pets in cars:

- **Cold Weather** – In the winter, a dog or a cat can become hypothermic if left in a locked car for an extended period of time. The vehicle will serve as a refrigerator and the animal will have a difficult time retaining his body heat. Any animal exhibiting signs of distress or hypothermia may be forcibly removed from a private vehicle for protection of the animal.
- **Hot Weather** - Even with the window cracked, temperatures may rise too quickly for an animal left in a car. Excitement, stress, and extreme *internal* temperature of the vehicle can quickly lead to heatstroke in an animal left in a car. Even if the air temperature is 80 degrees on a warm Spring day, the temperature inside the car can rise to over 90 degrees. Any animal exhibiting signs of distress or heatstroke may be forcibly removed from a private vehicle for protection of the animal.
- **Bite Risk** – In the most temperate weather, owners are sometimes tempted to leave their pets in the car, unattended. The car may be seen an extension of personal space, and the Good Samaritan that's wants to give the dog water or young child attempting to "pet the puppy" may get bitten by an overprotective animal. All allegations of animal bites must be reported to the Prince George's Health Department. This will lead to a quarantine period of either 10-days or 6-months, dependant on the Rabies vaccination status of the animal.
- **Window/Truck Jumpers** – It happens more than you think... Overexcited dogs and scared cats can push their way out of a car window in order to chase that squirrel, or to run away from that tractor trailer sound. This can happen as the vehicle is parked, idling at a stop light, or moving at over 30 miles per hour. Almost always there is some degree of injury – from bruises or lacerations to being hit by another passing vehicle. Sometimes, the fleeing animal is not recovered by the family. Even dogs in the bed of a pick-up truck have been known to jump over the rail, sometimes still tethered to the truck, leading to hanging or dragging of the animal.
- **Air Bags** – Front seat protective air bags have the potential to kill an animal that is in the driver's lap, or unsecured in the passenger seat.

The best way to avoid these situations and make your pet's car ride the best it can be is to follow the following guidelines:

- If running errands, leave the dog or cat at home. It would be a shame to loose your pet to cold, heat, or that danged squirrel because you had to run into the store for "just one minute."
- Keep your pet's Rabies vaccination up to date, and never allow the opportunity for strangers to approach your pet unattended in any setting.
- Provide carriers or seat belts for your pets for use while in transit. Some animals will protest their new limited restrictions, but most adapt relatively quickly.
- If transporting a dog in the back of a pick-up truck, utilize a crate or a kennel for protection of the animal as well as pedestrians, other animals, and opposing traffic. Even the best behaved dog can sometimes lose focus and cause unintentional harm.

For additional information, or to report an animal in distress, please contact College Park Animal Control at 240-487-3570 or vcooper@collegeparkmd.gov.