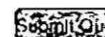


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Jean Woolery

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**HOLIDAY SEASON ISN'T THE BEST TIME TO ADOPT
PETS, ANIMAL EXPERTS SAY : CASES OF NEGLECT
RISE IN DECEMBER.(Jefferson County Post)**Article from St Louis Post-Dispatch (MO) | December 21 1998 | Seibert, Pamela ;
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A veterinarian and the director of a humane society agree that it's good to adopt cats and dogs, but strongly advise against it during the holiday season.

"It's tempting when you see a cute puppy or kitten in a cage in a pet shop at the mall to buy it for a gift," said Dr. John Warmbrodt, 49, veterinarian at the House Springs Animal Clinic. "It's impulsive, you're feeling sorry for the animal, but unless it's well thought out, buying a pet at this time of year probably isn't a good idea."

Such well-meaning efforts can backfire, he said. The pet may not be one the recipient would have chosen. It could be a dog that's too big, too aggressive or not right for some other reason. Or the recipient may not have either the facilities or the desire to care for a pet.

Pet adoption should be carefully planned with new owners considering such things as whether they can provide proper food and shelter, veterinary care and even obedience training, Warmbrodt said.

"Sadly, a lot of animals given as gifts don't work out, and then the animal is either given away or neglected, or, worst-case scenario, physically harmed or dumped somewhere to fend for itself," he said.

But not only is it unwise to give alive animal as a holiday gift, it also may not be a good idea to adopt a pet in the hustle and bustle of the holidays, Warmbrodt said.

"People are often too preoccupied with everything else that's going on, with all the excitement, to give proper care to the new pet," he said. "Neglect at this time of year is the most common form of abuse: people forgetting to keep the animal confined or not making sure it has access to food and clean water or shelter from the cold."

Holiday decorations can pose a serious threat, especially tinsel, which can be deadly when eaten by a kitten or puppy, Warmbrodt says.

"The strands can wrap around the base of the tongue and choke the animal, or if they're swallowed, can cut into the intestines with serious consequences," he said.

Warmbrodt said that while abuse during the holidays generally takes the form of neglect, people who are depressed or under stress sometimes take it out on their pets.

"We see abuse cases, situations where the person wasn't only negligent but set out to cause injury to an animal, at all times of the year," he said. "We don't really see too much more of that during the holidays than at other times."

Maybe it just seems more cruel when it happens at the holiday season, said Warmbrodt, recalling the case of a young dog he treated recently.

"Two weeks ago, an Australian shepherd puppy was brought into the clinic with three broken legs," he said. "The person who brought it in had seen someone throw it out of a moving car."

The dog, which is about 2 months old, is recovering and has been adopted.

Jean Woolery, who with her husband, Ernest, directs the Jefferson County Humane Society, believes pets are more neglected at the holiday season than at other times.

"There's a tendency to leave a dog tied up too long," said Woolery, 45. "The chain can get tangled or water bowl knocked over without anyone noticing."

Such was the case of a dog left chained in High Ridge recently when its owners went away on vacation, she said.

"Their grown daughter was supposed to check on the dog, but she never did," said Woolery. "Neighbors finally noticed four days later and called the Humane Society, but by then the dog was dead."

Woolery responded recently to a call from a mobile-home court in Byrnes Mill where two families had moved away and left behind three dogs. The dogs were captured and taken to the Humane Society. Woolery hopes to find foster homes for them.

Another recent neglect call involved five sharpei puppies, filthy and full of fleas. They had to be removed from a home, she said.

"In all neglect cases, we consider the welfare of the animal," Woolery said. "If the owner surrenders it to us, we believe that's enough and don't prosecute."

Another common form of neglect is allowing a pet to roam, Woolery said.

"This happens often in Jefferson County, and pets are frequently lost," she said. "What's heartbreaking is that very few people bother to look for their cat or dog. They just get another one and don't take good care of it, either."

But at this time of year, the main problem is that people can get busy and forget to put out food and water for their pets, she said.

"People need to remember that their pet is an important responsibility, which means it needs care during the holidays just like other times of the year," Woolery said. "We would ask people to please not forget that."