

All-Too-Common Poisons

Roger Doyle was preparing for the first cold snap of autumn and thought he'd change the antifreeze in his pickup. He drained the old antifreeze into a small bucket before adding a fresh supply. Instead of disposing of the waste, he let it sit in his garage, where his 3-year-old Brittany, Babe, was lured to the poison by its sweet smell and taste. Doyle found the dog dead the next morning when he went to take a dish of food to her.

"I simply wasn't thinking when I left the antifreeze out there," he said later, "and she was just turning into a really fine grouse and woodcock pointer."

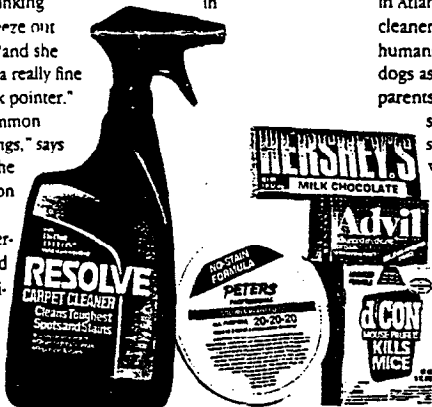
"Antifreeze is a common cause of dog poisonings," says Dr. William Buck of the National Animal Poison Control Center (NAPCC), "as are several common household agents." Human medicines, for example, are also common sources of dog poisonings. "The widely used pain reliever, ibuprofen," says Dr. Buck, "is the number two cause of all dog poisonings." Many dogs are attracted to the taste and smell of ibuprofen and will chew through plastic bottles to get to the drug.

One Minnesota hunter lost a young Labrador retriever when the dog chewed into a first-aid kit left in the back of an enclosed pickup. The pup ate an entire bottle of the drug. The tablets were absorbed by the dog too quickly to enable a vet to induce vomiting to expel the

drug, and the dog died.

Dogs that ingest too much of the drug often begin vomiting violently soon after the drug is absorbed and death can follow quickly. The NAPCC handled more than 23,000 cases of animal poisonings in 1992, and keeps an extensive listing of possible dog toxins at their facility

in



THE FIVE MOST COMMON DOG POISONS

1. Rat and mouse poison
2. Ibuprofen (pain medicine)
3. Chocolate
4. Chemical fertilizer
5. Petroleum distillates (lighter fluid, gas, oil, paint thinners, engine or rug cleaners, etc.)

Source: National Animal Poison Control Center



When afield near old homesteads, keep an eye out for discarded pesticides and fertilizers.

causing rapid and erratic heartbeats," says Dr. Buck, "and if the dosage is large enough, it will kill the dog." Tote along a dog biscuit to give to your dog the next time you're afield

instead of sharing a candy bar during a rest stop. SA

the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois.

"As a general rule," says Paul Bystrom of the Animal Branch of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, "plants, solvents and cleaners that are poisonous to humans are very likely toxic to dogs as well." Dog owners, like parents of small children,

should take special care to store any possible poisons well out of harm's way.

Gundog owners who might be hunting near old or abandoned farm buildings should also keep an eye out for rat and mouse poisons (which, combined, are the number one cause of all dog poisonings), as well as other pesti-

cides and fertilizers that can often be found in or near such sites. It only takes a few seconds for a dog to ingest enough poison to be fatal, so it's a good idea to keep a dog at "heel" while passing through farmsteads.

Other common—but lesser-known—dog poisons include such foods as chocolate. Ingredients in chocolate—such as theobromine and caffeine—are difficult for dogs to easily digest. "These drugs remain in a dog's system for a long time,

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG IS POISONED

If you suspect that your dog has been poisoned," says Sharon

Curtis of the American Veterinary Medical Association, "it's important to consult your veterinarian immediately." The National Animal Poison Control Center also offers a hotline (1-800/548-2423). There is a \$30 charge for the service and it can be paid by credit card only. Licensed veterinarians answer the calls and will help you identify what toxin might have poisoned your dog and what to do about it.

Veterinarians at the NAPCC will also contact your veterinarian to advise on a possible course of action. Since vets there handle a wide variety of poisoning cases each year, they are especially qualified to assist dog owners whose pets have been poisoned. Dr. Buck advises that gundog owners with short questions about dog poisons dial a different number (1-900/680-0000), where the charge is \$2.95 per minute.

REPEAT: Ingredients in chocolate--such as theobromine and caffeine--are difficult for dogs to digest. "These drugs remain in a dog's system for a long time, causing rapid and erratic heartbeats, and if the dosage is large enough, it will kill the dog." This is Christmastime when there is a lot of chocolate around, so be extra careful not to leave it where your dog can get to it. [A.M.]