

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**First Arctic Blast of the Season Endangers Pets:
Humane Society of Berks County Increases Staff to Respond
Swiftly to Reports On the Emergency Pet “Cold-Line”**

With the first part of the 2006/2007 winter season being warmer than usual, the Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County’s leader in animal welfare, is preparing for a surge in calls about endangered pets during this first blast of arctic air in our region. To address this expected increase in emergency calls, the HSBC has “called up” additional staff and volunteers to respond swiftly to emergency calls on its seasonally renamed “Cruelty Cold-line”. Officers and volunteers are ready to respond to emergency calls involving animals in distress due to the extreme cold, 24 hours a day.

“Rapid response is vital when temperatures drop this low and the winds pick up,” says Karel Minor, Executive Director. “Pets, particularly those kept outside, can swiftly succumb to hypothermia and die.” The HSBC’s five State certified Humane Society Police Officers, three Animal Protective Services Officers, and trained emergency field volunteers are ready to respond quickly to emergency calls. Anyone wishing to report pets in distress should call the HSBC at 610-921-2348 and choose option “1”. They will be put in touch with an officer 24 hours a day or receive a call back within 15 minutes.

With freezing temperatures and the threat of snow and ice, the Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC) is urging pet owners to take extra precautions to keep dogs and cats safe during the cold winter months. “Like people, cats and dogs need protection from wet and cold,” says Chief Humane Officer Joni LaVigna, of the Animal Protective Services department at the HSBC in Reading.

“When the temperature falls below 20 degrees, it is best to keep all dogs indoors, even if they have doghouses,” LaVigna says. “Short-haired dogs, small dogs and puppies should be kept indoors when temperatures are at 40 degrees or lower.” If dogs must be kept

outside, doghouses should be elevated a few inches off the ground and spread with clean, dry bedding. A flap over the opening will help keep out drafts, she adds.

“Remember to check outdoor water bowls often when it is below freezing and break the ice or refill with water as necessary. A bowl of frozen water is useless to a thirsty pet,” LaVigna says. “Also, never leave your dog or cat alone in a car during the cold weather. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold. Your pet could freeze to death.”

Antifreeze, frequently used during the cold winter months, may be useful for the operation of a car but it is poisonous to animals. “The sweet smell of antifreeze attracts dogs and cats and tastes good to them. Antifreeze, however, is highly toxic and deadly,” she says. “Store antifreeze out of reach of pets and thoroughly wipe up any spills. The most likely source of the poison is radiator drainage spots in the garage. These should be flushed with water immediately.”

Cats are best kept indoors. In addition to the dangers that dogs face during the winter months, car engines sometimes provide a warm and inviting sleeping place for cats left out in the cold,” LaVigna says. “Cats may crawl up under cars seeking shelter and warmth near car engines. However, they may get caught in the fan and become seriously injured when the engine starts,” she says. “Open the hood of your car or slap it noisily with your hand before starting the engine on cold days to startle any animal sleeping there.”

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society offers adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading.

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