

MEDIA RELEASE  
For Immediate Release

Contact  
Billy Griswold, DVM  
Priority Pet Hospital  
P 480.857.7234  
dr.griswold@prioritypethospital.com

### **Holidays Pose Unique Hazards to Cats**

GILBERT, AZ – December 10, 2010 – "Holiday decorations, plants and gifts can be a real danger to pets," says Dr. Karin Burns of Priority Pet Hospital in Gilbert. Burns, an active member of the American Association of Feline Practitioners, says that while dogs are more likely to eat a plate of brownies or swallow small parts of toys, "cats are unique and have their own set of hazards during the holidays." Pet owners can ensure that their holidays will be safe and happy for every family member by keeping these hazards away from cats and letting guests and relatives know how unsafe they are.

Dr. Burns offers this list of five holiday threats for cat lovers to bear in mind:

(1) **Christmas trees.** Ingestion of the needles of live Christmas trees can cause vomiting, lack of appetite, abdominal pain, and lethargy. When large amounts are ingested, surgery can be required to remove them from the stomach. Water preservatives are primarily diluted sugar and fertilizer. Most cats that drink Christmas tree water develop no signs of illness, but mild stomach upset can occur. In rare instances, bacterial or fungal contamination of the water contributes to more severe illness. Some cats risk electrocution when they chew exposed wires from holiday lights. Cover light wires with protective plastic "cord managers" to protect cats from this electrical hazard. Finally, while pine sap is not toxic, Dr. Burns suggests using something oily (such as olive oil or mayonnaise) to remove it from cat fur; this works much better than shampoo.

(2) **Holiday plants.** A number of seasonal plants pose dangers to cats. The ingestion of any plant can cause stomach upset such as vomiting or diarrhea, but others, such as those below, are of more concern. Vomiting that won't cease after food and water are withheld for four to six hours should be addressed by a veterinarian.

Despite their reputation, *poinsettias*, are not particularly toxic, and ingestions typically result in little more than vomiting and abdominal pain.

*Mistletoe* can be toxic to the heart, but ingestion of a few leaves or berries generally causes mild stomach upset. Large ingestions can be dangerous. Fortunately, Burns says, "most cats just nibble and vomit." When mistletoe is purchased in a store, the berries frequently have been removed and replaced with plastic "berries" which can become foreign bodies if swallowed by cats.

All parts of the *holly* plant are considered to be toxic, and significant ingestions can be very dangerous. The good news is that true poisonings are not common in cats, though most ingestions cause gastrointestinal irritation and lethargy.

*Amaryllis* is a common ornamental bulb that is often forced to bloom during the Holidays. All parts are toxic, but the bulbs are the worst. Cats usually only eat the foliage and flower, leading to drooling,

vomiting and diarrhea. Ingesting the bulb can cause low blood pressure, weakness, imbalance, tremors and seizures.

*Lilies* aren't necessarily a Christmas plant, but they can be found in bouquets any time of year. True lilies (Easter lilies, tiger lilies, day lilies, etc.) cause kidney failure in cats. Even tiny exposures like a single bite on a leaf or ingestion of pollen can result in illness. All feline exposures to lilies should be considered potentially life-threatening and addressed by a veterinarian. Cats begin to vomit within a few hours after exposure, and kidney failure develops within 24 to 72 hours.

(3) Exposure to **liquid potpourri** can result in severe damage to the skin, mouth, and eyes; any exposure should be treated as a veterinary emergency. Liquid potpourri is a combination of oils and detergents that can cause irritation and chemical burns. They can also cause other symptoms including lethargy, coma, seizures, low blood pressure, muscular weakness and twitching, collapse, and respiratory difficulty. Cats may taste these liquids directly, or suffer skin exposure from simmer pots or spills.

(4) **Silica gel** packets. Silica gel packs are included as moisture absorbents in shoeboxes, electronics, medications and food. Since silica gel comes in paper packets or plastic cylinders, cats find them fascinating. They're great toys to bat around and make a fun noise. Because the packets are clearly marked "Do Not Ingest," poison control centers—human and animal—field many calls about them. Fortunately, most ingestions will not cause illness, but if enough granules are eaten, mild stomach upset can occur. The biggest concern is that packets swallowed whole can become foreign bodies.

(5) **Tinsel, ribbon and string.** Cats are particularly attracted to shiny tinsel, ribbons and string on holiday trees and packages. These can be deadly if swallowed. These objects often become wrapped around the cat's tongue and are swallowed. When they enter the intestines, they can cause the intestines to perforate, often with deadly results. Cats with these "linear" foreign bodies may demonstrate several signs of illness, including vomiting, lack of appetite, difficulty defecating, abdominal pain, and lethargy. Dr. Burns cautions that cat owners who see their cats trying to defecate a piece of tinsel or string should never pull on it, as serious consequences can develop.

**About Priority Pet Hospital:** Serving Gilbert, Chandler, and Queen Creek, Priority Pet Hospital is a full-service veterinary practice providing preventive care and vaccines, spay/neuter services, general medicine, surgery, and dentistry for dogs and cats. Our low-stress approach to handling puts four-legged family members at ease. The team at Priority Pet Hospital has been caring for pets and the people who love them in since 2008.

###

For more information about Priority Pet Hospital, visit us at [www.prioritypethospital.com](http://www.prioritypethospital.com) or call 480.857.7234.