

Keeping pets, children safe in warm temps

By Nancy Williams

With warmer weather right around the corner, health officials are reminding residents never to leave children or pets unattended inside vehicles, even for a few minutes.

Each year, children and pets die in hot cars. It is important that everyone take precautions in order to avoid these injuries and deaths.

Temperatures inside vehicles can climb quickly, especially on hot days, and even with the windows partially down.

Heat stress or stroke, irreparable brain damage and death can follow shortly thereafter. Parking in the shade is also not recommended because the sun can move and directly expose a vehicle.

California law allows law enforcement and animal services officers to take swift action to remove a child or animal in distress inside a vehicle. The individual(s) responsible for leaving a child or pet in danger in a motor vehicle can be cited, and they can face fines and jail time. Felony charges can apply if the child or pet is seriously injured or dies. In addition to heat-related injuries, children and pets left unattended in vehicles can be subject to carbon monoxide poisoning, runaway vehicles, abduction and other dangers.

These safety rules can help prevent heat-related injuries and other vehicle dangers:

- Never leave a child, pet or vulnerable person (such as an elderly or medically frail person) alone in or around a vehicle.

- Check to make sure all children leave the vehicle when you reach your destination, particularly when loading and unloading. Do not overlook sleeping infants.
- Place a reminder of your child or pet's presence where you would be sure to see it before leaving the vehicle.
- Never leave a child in a vehicle with the motor running or the key in the ignition.
- Keep car keys away from children at all times.
- Always lock your car, even at home, and remind your friends and neighbors to do the same. Children die every year when they get into unlocked cars on their own and cannot get out.
- Teach children not to play in, on or around cars.
- Remove your pet from your vehicle when returning home.
- Do not transport an animal in a trunk of a vehicle nor in the bed of a pickup in hot weather. Animal's paws can burn on an extremely hot day.
- Call 911 if you observe a child or vulnerable person in distress in an unattended vehicle.

Contact El Dorado County Animal Services at 530.621.5795 on the West Slope or 530.573.7925 in South Lake Tahoe if you observe a pet in distress in a vehicle.

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