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BAY OF PLENTY TIMES

SPCA and Tauranga vet voice concern about second-hand smoke and pets

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3 minutes to read



Veterinarian Dr Liza Schneider. Photo / File
Bay of Plenty Times

As part of World Smokefree Day today, SPCA is calling for pet owners to learn about, and act to reduce, the health impacts of second-hand smoke on animals.

SPCA chief scientific officer Dr Arnja Dale said people might not realise that second-hand smoke increases health risks to pets and has been associated with cancers and respiratory infections, similar to the effect on humans.

In a written statement the SPCA said studies had shown that exposure to tobacco and second-hand smoke had been associated with certain cancers in

dogs and cats, as well as eye, skin and respiratory diseases in birds, rabbits, guinea pigs, lizards and amphibians.

It had also been proven to affect fish as the pollutants from smoke are absorbed into their water and can harm the fish, according to the SPCA.

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Vaping can also pose a risk to pets, as ingestion of even small amounts of nicotine can result in nicotine poisoning. Liquid nicotine used in vapes was absorbed much faster and may be more concentrated than in cigarettes. Flavoured vape liquids may also be appealing to pets, particularly dogs.

If pet owners do vape, the SPCA urges them to keep the device and liquid nitrogen in a safe place, out of reach of pets.

"If you are still working through the process of quitting, don't smoke around your pets, inside or outside. Keep both your home and car smokefree to reduce the risk of cancers and serious smoke-related health problems for your family and pets," Dale said.

Holistic Vets founder and veterinarian Dr Liza Schneider said while pets getting sick from second-hand smoke was not common, there were instances where it was clear smoke was playing a role.

She said animals suffering from respiratory problems could struggle to breathe and it could lead to them being "very uncomfortable".

Since pets couldn't communicate their health status to humans, it could be hard to know the full impact of smoking on pets.

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"For all we know, they could be getting headaches."

She said smokers might not be considerate of pets so she often had to ask "a lot of questions" to determine whether second-hand smoke was playing a role or not.

Smokers dumping cigarette butts also posed a threat to wildlife, she said.

Effect of second-hand smoke on pets

• Cats

Cats lick themselves when grooming and this causes them to ingest dangerous carcinogens from smoke that are absorbed by their fur. Cats in households with second-hand smoke exposure are almost 2.5 times more likely to develop malignant lymphoma as cats with no exposure. The risk increases to 3.2 times more likely in cats exposed for five or more years.

• Dogs

Dogs exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to suffer from a range of diseases, including nasal cancer, lung cancer, asthma and bronchitis, than non-exposed dogs. The shape of a dog's head plays a role in the types of cancer most likely to develop. Long-muzzled dogs, such as collies, are 250 per cent more likely to develop nasal cancer, since their nasal passages have more surface area on which the toxins can accumulate. Breeds with short muzzles are more likely to develop lung cancer and other respiratory diseases.

Source: SPCA