

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

Dear Dr. Schmidt,

I recently read that rock salt and other ice melt products can be harmful to my dog. How can I protect her this winter? Thanks, Cindy

Dear Cindy,

That's an excellent question and the short answer is yes, many of these products contain sodium ingredients which can be toxic to dogs. You should be very careful to limit exposure whenever your dog is outside during the winter months. If your dog does ingest these products the most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhea. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center also reports that these products may cause depression, tremors, disorientation, loss of appetite, increased water consumption, seizures and even death. Smaller dogs are at higher risk for the more serious neurological problems, as weight has a direct impact on the severity of the symptoms. A dog that ingests 4g (less than 1 oz.) of sodium chloride per 1kg (2.3 lbs) of body weight could die. That would mean a dog weighing 4 lbs would need to eat about 2 ounces of ice melt containing sodium chloride to result in death. The center also advises that if you don't need to use ice melt, don't. Let the sun melt the extra snow away. An alternative would be to use sand or kitty litter instead of ice melt; this will provide the needed traction, but unfortunately won't melt the ice. If you do use ice melt, make sure to purchase a brand that lists the full details of the ingredients. Labels can be very deceiving. Unlike the food industry, the ice melt industry has no FDA-like regulations regarding honesty in the statements they use on packaging. It is important to look closely at the ingredients. Labeling ice melt products with the "Pet Safe" claim is most often simply a marketing tactic--they may or may not be safer for pets. When comparing the ingredients of many "Pet Safe" products to regular brands, many read exactly the same. However, both Safe Paws and Morton Safe-T-Pet are labeled as "Pet Safe" and truly do not contain salt or chloride. You may also want the added protection of dog socks or boots. Remember, though you may use no ice melt products or only "Pet Safe" products, it's doubtful that your neighbors and township will spend the extra money for these brands. Always rinse off your pet's feet whenever exposed to ice melt or ice melt chemicals. Good Luck, Cindy, and Be Safe this winter!

Submitted by: Dr Douglas Schmidt



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