



Veterinary practice briefing about antifreeze poisonings

The majority of antifreeze products contain the active ingredient ethylene glycol (EG). This substance is fatally toxic in very small quantities; just 5ml will kill a cat. Following ingestion, EG metabolites lead to acidosis and the deposition of renal calcium oxalate crystals. Unless treated within two to three hours, affected cats will die as a result of acute renal failure, associated with severe pain.

Cats Protection has been recording media reports of feline EG poisonings since spring 2012 and the majority are geographically clustered, indicating the probability that the poisonings are deliberate. Well-meaning people often attempt to warn others about poisonings in the area via the local press, however, CP would strongly advise against warning the public about the risks of antifreeze via the media because publicity risks inspiring copycat killings.

One way of raising awareness among the appropriate group of people is for vets to contact all the cat owners on their books to warn them about poisonings in their area. This is a good way of warning feline-friendly people to be vigilant and increase their awareness of the signs of poisoning and the importance of seeking veterinary advice if poisoning is suspected.

We have created a letter your practice might consider sending to your cat-owning clients by post or email in the event of a spate of local poisonings, outlining:

- The dangers of ethylene glycol
- The signs of poisoning to look out for in cats
- The importance of seeking veterinary advice swiftly
- The reasons to avoid publicity
- How to reduce the risk of accidental poisonings
- The option of informing the police and/or RSPCA if deliberate poisoning is suspected

Hopefully sending letters and/or emails out to your cat-owning clients in the event of local poisonings will help discourage concerned individuals from publicising, and thereby potentially increasing, poisonings. We believe this approach will also have the positive effect of informing feline-friendly people about practical measures to take if they suspect a feline poisoning. We hope you find this briefing and template helpful and would be delighted to receive your feedback, comments or suggested improvements by email at advocacy@cats.org.uk.

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