

To Whom It May Concern:

As a member of the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists, a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists, founder of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University, and author of five highly acclaimed books as well as more than 100 scientific articles and contributions to peer-reviewed journals, I would like to offer my professional opinion regarding dogs and cats being kept outdoors in severe weather conditions.

Domestic dogs and cats have evolved to depend upon humans for survival and have been bred to have much shorter coats than their wild ancestors as well as unique physical characteristics that diminish their ability to survive outdoors. **For most domestic animal companions, the general rule of thumb is that if it's too cold or hot for you, it's too cold or hot for your dog or cat.**

Cold Weather: Because they can experience extreme discomfort when left outdoors in cold weather, I recommend that dogs and cats be brought indoors when the temperature drops to near or below freezing. Those who are small, underweight, or ill, puppies and kittens, seniors, and those with short hair coats should be brought inside well before the temperature gets that low. A major concern during low temperatures is frozen water—without access to fresh, potable water, dogs and cats quickly dehydrate, which can prove fatal at any temperature. Law enforcement officers should be on the lookout for the following symptoms of severe discomfort from cold temperatures: hunched posture, lifting paws to keep them off the cold ground, squinting, and shivering. As they develop hypothermia, animals may show signs of weakness, lethargy, and muscle stiffness, which lead to difficulty breathing, and death.

Animal companions should also be brought inside during wet or windy conditions, regardless of whether they are provided shelter outdoors. Most doghouses are not properly insulated to protect fully against cold weather and they are most certainly no substitute for being indoors. In an attempt to keep warm and dry, animals kept chained or penned outside are forced to remain inside any shelter provided, which is often no more than a wood or plastic box or barrel. During cold weather, which usually lasts for months, this arrangement also denies them adequate exercise and the ability to partake in basic, natural behaviors, such as choosing where to sit or lie or changing views to prevent boredom and the impacts of solitary confinement.

Hot Weather: When temperatures rise, dogs and cats must be protected from potential heat stress. Dogs rely primarily on panting to cool themselves and are particularly at risk of hyperthermia in hot, humid weather. In warm, sunny weather, all dogs and cats should be provided access to shade, cool water, and adequate ventilation. Animals with thicker coats, black or dark hair, overweight, older, and brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds are at even higher risk of overheating. In temperatures and humidity gradients high enough to make a human uncomfortable, dogs and cats must be brought into a temperature-controlled environment to prevent their extreme discomfort and irreversible organ failure, which can come on rapidly. Heat stress is indicated by heavy panting, and if left untreated, will quickly progress to heatstroke, with signs including dark red tongue and gums, vomiting, diarrhea, stumbling, collapse, seizure, and death.

It should also be noted that prolonged exposure to all weather conditions, as experienced by dogs and cats kept outdoors, compromises the immune system, making them more susceptible to illness in general and more likely to succumb to the effects of severe weather. The easiest way to protect dogs and cats from the weather is not to leave them outdoors.

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