

Cash in on the Cold

Offering products that keep furry family members warm and comfortable during winter weather can thaw the bottom line.

By Lizett Bond

Waking in the morning to the silence created by a fresh blanket of snow, or lying in bed at night listening to a gentle rain, are some of life's simple pleasures. But throw pet ownership into the equation and those delights often become a source of stress as owners worry about how their four-legged loved ones will fare against the elements.

Outside Heating Solutions

"It's important to make sure a pet's outdoor shelter is adequate for the colder months by accounting for wind, rain and snow protection, as well as providing a warm place to relax," said Carolyn Doherty, canine behavior specialist and co-author of "Petscaping."

Positioning the doghouse to minimize wind and rain is important as well, Doherty added, and facing the opening towards a wall will help block the elements.

During chilly weather, a heated doghouse can provide pet owners with peace of mind. For working owners, the worry of a dog in the house all day is eliminated when they know their pet has a warm shelter outside.

"If owners get stuck in traffic or are working late, they know their dog is warm," said Mike Hill, owner of Akoma Dog Products in Big Lake, Mont., which offers its thermostatically controlled Hound Heater for this purpose.

Adding that a house should also be well-insulated and not overbuilt as far as size, Hill con-

tinued that a heated doghouse also imparts health benefits for pooches by providing arthritic dogs, for example, a spot to curl up and stay warm. Furthermore, outdoor dogs typically require more food to generate enough energy to cope with the cold, industry professionals reported.

However, Hill noted that in his experience, outdoor dogs with a heated house generally do not show an increase in nutritional demands during cold weather.

Conversely, Beth McElroy, owner of Dog Day Aftergroom in Monroe, N.Y., said indoor pets may experience a decrease in nutritional requirements because of reduced exercise during winter months.

"If anything, they should be a little leaner in the winter," she said.

Heated pet beds also provide warm, cozy quarters during bleak weather. Dawn Buffington, sales manager for K & H Manufacturing in Colorado Springs, Colo., noted that the company's Lectro-Soft heated dog bed is designed for outdoor use and is thermostatically controlled to heat up to a pet's normal body temperature, with a removable plush soft cover. This style is also offered for cats with the Lectro Soft Outdoor heated kitty pad. An igloo-style heated pad with a removable cover is designed to fit three sizes of igloo doghouses.

The company also offers a heated pad for small animals,

such as rabbits, and is designed for indoor or outdoor use.

"Pets are our children, so we really try to take care of them," she added.

Freezing weather means frozen water, and a pet's water bowl is not exempt. Pets without access to clean, unfrozen water are more likely to drink out of puddles and gutters, which can contain harmful pollutants. Because the danger of dehydration is present even in cold weather, heated water bowls can provide the answer to these dilemmas.

Various manufacturers make products to address this issue. K & H Manufacturing's Thermal water bowls are available in two sizes and are designed to keep water from freezing even in sub-zero temperatures.

Melting the Ice

Other negative health effects can appear in pets due to weather conditions and cold, wet ground. Outdoor strolls in snow and ice can result in rock salt, ice and chemical ice melts lodging in footpads and causing inflammation. Ingested, these products can also cause irritation to the digestive track. Even if a pet is only outside to do his business, ice can become an issue.

"There is definitely a large segment of the population that you could call 'pet parents,' and they really want to protect their pets," said Sara Matuszak, brand manager for Morton Salt in Chicago. "They want to make sure that their paws stay safe and their pets are safe in the winter, so we are seeing an increase in demand [for pet-safe de-icers]."

"Really, one of the biggest concerns pet parents had about ice melt was that it would hurt pets paws, so we really wanted to develop something that would



address that concern and help make the winter season safer for pets," she added.

With that in mind, child and pet-safe ice melt is an important consideration. Steve Greenwald, vice president of sales and marketing for Gaia Enterprises in Richboro, Pa., and creator of Safe Paw Ice Melt, noted that when an ice-melt is used, it can be spread around, picked up on paws, hands or shoes, or even ingested, and a product utilizing ingredients that are safe is vital under these circumstances.

"When it comes to the environment around a home or business, you need to pay particular attention to warning labels," he noted. "Stay away from products that say 'keep away from kids and pets.'"

Because ice-melt product safety considerations are of paramount importance where pets are concerned, reading labels and checking before making a purchase or using a product outside are necessary.

"It's important to look for a chloride- or salt-free formulation and read the labels for that," Matuszak said. "In working with veterinarians, that's what we found to be safest for pets."

Ice melt products for pets don't generally require a great deal of instruction on use from retailers, making them easier to

offer in-store.

"Pet-safe de-icers don't require a lot of education from the retailer," Julie Pilas of Elephant Nose Pet Center in Morristown, N.J. "Customers want it."

Bedding and Décor

Even indoors, pets appreciate a warm, snugly place to lounge and snooze, and Pilas noted that her customers prefer the Radiant Warming Insert by Four Paws for this purpose. Designed for use indoors or outdoors, this product works naturally by reflecting a pet's body heat when placed between the cushion and the pet.

"I have customers using this if the dog is outside on a four-season porch, but it works well for an older, indoor pet that may have arthritis," she added.

Various pet bedding options exist to help furry loved ones cope with winter's cold. The K&H Manufacturing's All Season snugly Sleeper is designed for both summer and winter use. The interchangeable system offers a plush heated pillow insert for comfy winter warmth and in summer months, the cooling insert provides relief from heat.

Speaking of relief, chilly indoor birds with cold tootsies can warm up with K&H Manufacturing's Thermo Bird Perch. With a safe 12-volt thermostati-

cally controlled heating element, the perch attaches to the cage like a traditional roost.

"Most birds lose heat through their feet since they don't have feathers there," K&H Manufacturing's Buffington said. "They love this perch."

Home-based winterizing approaches are often necessary for consumers, but in some cases, they have to consider winterizing vehicles too. An outing in the car may be a treat, but in extreme cold such an excursion can be deadly for pets. Treating Fido to a "ride along" during errand time becomes a possibility with The Hound Warmer from Akoma Dog Products. The heated seat cushion plugs into the cigarette lighter, providing a canine-seat warmer.

"If dogs get cold they can lay on it, if it's too warm they move off of it," said Hill. ■



Reminding owners that their pets are also susceptible to cold weather can help promote sales—and pet wellbeing.