



# Keep Your Pets Safe Around Water

We have all heard about the danger to small children of having a swimming pool in your back yard, but did you know that your pets are at risk for drowning to, especially puppies and kittens (cats are always safest when kept indoors!) Every year hundreds of dogs die in swimming pools. The San Bernardino County Animal Care & Control Program would like to encourage those of you that have dogs and pools to take the time to educate your dog and show it the right way to get in and out of the pool. We are not suggesting that your dog cannot swim — he probably can, but the question is can he find his way out once he gets in? Most dogs will swim to the closest part of the pool and try to pull themselves out. However, your pet can die of exhaustion just trying to get out of the pool or holding on to the edge with its paws. The sad thing is that some dogs die when they are only a short distance away from the safety of the pool steps — they just don't know it.

It is a good idea to teach your dog how to get out of your pool safely. You can do this by placing the dog in the pool with you and guiding him to the steps/ladder. You will need to do this repeatedly until the dog can find his way out of the pool unassisted. You will need

to review the lesson at least twice a year (there are many classes/books available to teach you step by step how to accomplish this).

Even if your dog knows how to swim, he may not be able to get out of the pool if he accidentally falls in. Some dogs go into a panic mode, which is that panic-sticken energy and excitement that makes him just flop his paws around, looking for a way out, and when he can't find it he eventually tires out and drowns. Short-legged dogs, such as Dachshunds and Chihuahuas have the most difficulty trying to climb out of pools. Pool ladders may help, but some dogs are too small to use a ladder or they may not know how to climb it. Even if your pool has steps, not all dogs will know to look for them if they fall into the water. Therefore, the most important thing that you can do is **NEVER** leave your dog alone and unsupervised around your pool.

You also need to remember that swimming is strenuous exercise so you need to watch your pet for fatigue and take them out for rest periods. Dogs with longer, heavier coats cannot swim as well and need to be watched at all times.

Remember, too, that not all dogs are natural swimmers. You may want to consider purchasing a doggy life vest (available in a variety of sizes and colors from local pet supply stores or online) — especially if you have a pet that is older and/or overweight. Not only will this keep your pet safe, but it will also ease the amount of work they have to do, which allows them to swim longer. Lifejackets can also save your pet's life if you take them to the lake and they become extremely fatigued or you take them out on a boat and they get knocked off.

After a swim make sure that you rinse your dog off with fresh water because the chemicals used in pools can be irritating to your pet's skin. You will also need to dry out their ear canals so they do not develop infections.

If you have a pool or live along side a body of water, it is best to put up a fence to keep your pet safe. If that is not possible, you will need to research other products, such as humane pet deterrents, which can help you train your pet to stay away from your pool.

A pool cover is also a very important safety feature. You will need to make sure that the cover fits tight and that your pet cannot get trapped underneath it or fall through it, which can lead to suffocation or drowning.

Pet water safety needs to take place not just around pools, but also hot tubs, ponds, lakes, and rivers. Dogs can suffer from **hypothermia** if they fall into unheated body's of water. If this happens it is imperative to make sure you get them warm and dry as soon as possible. Some of the symptoms of severe hypothermia include dilated pupils, stupor or coma, pale or blue gums, decreased heart and respiratory rate, and shivering. The heart and kidneys may also be affected. If you witness any of these symptoms, wrap your pet in a blanket and lay hot water bottles (or water balloons) next to them. Do **NOT** use heating pads because they may cause burns to your pet. Take your pet to the emergency clinic as soon as possible.

San Bernardino County  
Animal Care & Control Program  
**(800) 472-5609**

