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## Guest column: Emergency vet services earn brownie points

**By Suzie ZQ Taylor**

For The Daily Astorian

What do veterinarians, fireworks and brownies have in common? They all converged at the intersection of pandemonium and chaos on the night of the Fourth of July.

Imagine learning that the two dogs you are watching for a friend are frantically terrified of loud noises at the same time neighbors are shooting off an impressive pyrotechnics show 20 yards away.

Now imagine your own little dog, say, a mellow 15-pound Boston Terrier named Hilo, covertly scarfing down half a plate of your homemade brownies during the calamity.

This was happening to me at the bewitching hour of 9:55p.m. on Saturday, July 4. And my husband was out of town, of course.

While I knew chocolate was bad for dogs, I actually didn't know the details and decided to call local veterinarian Dr. Larry Goza's office to be safe rather than sorry. His telephone recording provided me with the phone number of an after-hours veterinarian.

After dialing the next number, I was rewarded with the friendly voice of Piri Popma, the veterinary technician at Seaside Pet Clinic, who was shouting questions and information into her cell phone, precisely as local fireworks were going off in her background. I learned that the amount my dog had ingested could lead to seizure, coma and ultimately death if the toxins would pass through his stomach and get absorbed into his intestinal tract.

We barked answers back and forth amid the thunderous staccatos, until we formulated a plan of triage that went something like this: dog in the kitchen sink, his jaws firmly clenched, and me attempting to pour a shot glass of undiluted hydrogen peroxide down his throat to urgently induce vomiting. Now, understand that this is a pet that vomits when he's nervous, vomits after eating "yard treasure" and vomits when he's bored. But at this critical moment, as the phone is propped between my shoulder and my ear, and I'm now walking him outside, flashlight clasped in spare fingers, Hilo doesn't want to vomit. After nearly an hour, he upchucks the motherload of coffeehouse-style foam and remnants of whole brownies he obviously inhaled rather than savored. And all was well.

While the love affair that women share with chocolate can be good in many ways, our canine counterparts are not so lucky. Turns out that ordinary cocoa powder, which many of us use for baking, has 12 1/2 times the amount of toxin called theobromine than regular milk chocolate and more than five times the toxins in dark chocolate.

All chocolates contain caffeine, also toxic to dogs. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), mild signs of poisoning occur in animals ingesting as little as 20 milligrams of theobromine and caffeine per kilogram of bodyweight, while severe signs occur at as little as 40 milligrams per kilogram

For those of us stubbornly refusing to convert to the metric system, allow me to translate: If Buddy is a 70-pound Labrador Retriever, a little over one pound of milk chocolate is considered severe. And if Bruiser weighs less than your laptop or handbag, half a candy bar or half an ounce of dry cocoa powder can be lethal if not treated.

Fortunately, protecting Fido along the North Coast is easier than we might think. That's because Oregon dictates that every community provide emergency veterinary services. Larger cities usually have emergency clinics open 24 hours each day. For those of us living or visiting on either vertical stretch of coast from Astoria, we benefit from a collaborative system. Four local veterinary offices band together to provide around-the-clock services, including Columbia Veterinary Hospital, Astoria Animal Hospital, Oceanside Animal Clinic and Seaside Pet Clinic.

Dr. Dianne Brown, at Seaside Pet Clinic, manages the after-hours rotation schedule for doctors of these facilities. They collectively also try to make hotels and local police and fire stations aware of the after-hours care to better service visiting pets. On July 4, Dr. Brown and Popma were on call.

The doctor took care of six emergency patients in the office while the vet tech answered and managed calls such as mine. There was no cost for my phone triage but each facility may charge an emergency fee if pets require in-office treatment. The Bayshore Animal Hospital does not regularly participate in this service but provides emergency care to its clients.

Lessons learned: Always call the vet to be sure. Always put the brownies away. Or better yet, ensure that there are no leftovers.

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