

## HOLIDAY AND WINTER HAZARDS FOR PET BIRDS

Each season brings with it different situations which affect our pet birds. Winter brings a number of these, but it also brings the holiday season with its own potential hazards. Being aware of the possible problems can be a great help in preventing a tragedy.

### WINTER HAZARDS

**Fires In The Fireplace** - Enjoy the warm glow of a winter fire. Just be sure to keep the yule logs and fire color additives away from your birds. They contain heavy metals such as arsenic, barium, lead and selenium. If ingested, they could cause heavy metal poisoning. Particles may also be included in the smoke. Even better, keep birds out of the room when you have a fire. Smoke is an irritant to us and surely is to our feathered friends.

**Bathing** - Turning on our furnaces often leads to dry air. Dry air can mean dry skin and dry breathing passages for our pet birds. Try to keep the humidity up near your birds. And be sure they can bathe frequently.

**Drafts** - It's cold out there. Check windows and doors for leaks. Birds can handle lower temperatures, but a cold draft can make your bird ill.

**Teflon Heaters and Appliances** - More and more manufacturers are using Teflon in their appliances. These include heaters, lamps, Teflon coated bulbs, irons, stove top burners, griddles, hair dryers, etc. When Teflon is heated it gives off poisonous fumes which can quickly kill. Recent reports indicate that Teflon fumes are generated at temperatures as low as 285 degrees. There have also been reports that using multiple appliances at the same time is additive and increases the amount of Teflon fumes in the air.

Many of us use space heaters to warm those extra cold areas in our homes. In winter we also use more lamps and bulbs. And of course the windows are closed, reducing ventilation. Teflon fumes are carried on air currents, so a bird does not have to be in the room to be affected. Before you buy appliances, read the labels and purchase the non-Teflon brands. Check the electrical appliances you already own. DON'T use Teflon near your birds.

**Halogen Lamps** - Halogen lamps are very hot. A bird landing on one, can be burned. If you do use halogen lamps, be sure to supervise your birds when they are out.

**Power Outages** - For some of us winter storms can bring power outages. Plan for emergencies. How will you keep your birds warm, feed them and provide light if you lose power? In dire emergencies how will you evacuate your home? Inexpensive backup power supplies are available. Keep carriers, heating pads, prepared food packets and bottled water available for quick access.

### PARTY TIME

This is the time for parties and for creating a special holiday atmosphere in our homes. Let's all celebrate, but remember a few safety precautions.

**Incense and Candles** - Scented candles, incense, carpet fresheners and air fresheners contain volatile oils which are poisonous to birds. You can enjoy your candlelight, but use unscented candles

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and supervise your birds when they are out. To give your home that holiday aroma, try boiling herbs such as cloves, mint or cinnamon.

**Lots Of Cooking In The Kitchen** - Check all the seldom used appliances you are going to use for Teflon - the electric frying pan, wok, the bread maker, cake pans, hot food servers and warmers. If you must use them, BE CAREFUL! Don't let any of them overheat, be sure there is ventilation and keep your birds away. Also be aware that fumes from self cleaning ovens have killed birds. Hand clean your ovens with a safe product instead.

Holiday cooking is a time for lots of sauces, gravies and goodies - many cooking and being mixed at the same time. They will smell as good to your birds as they do to you. Watch out for inquisitive birds who will fly or jump into a pot or bowl of hot food or a container filled with liquid. Smaller birds can get trapped in a container of liquid and drown. Cover your pots while cooking. Be careful when using electrical mixers and beaters. And keep the drawers closed. A small bird can be trapped when an open drawer or cabinet door is shut. Better yet, this is not the best time to bring your pet bird into the kitchen with you.

**Holiday Plants** - Poinsettia plants, Christmas cactus, Holly berries and Mistletoe berries are dangerous to birds. Poinsettia stems have a milky sap which irritates eyes and the digestive tract. Holly tree berries also irritate the gastrointestinal tract. Mistletoe berries are toxic.

**Trees And Decorations** - Keep your birds away from your Christmas tree as there are many ways that our feathered friends can be hurt from them. Do your best to make your tree bird safe. Pine and fir trees are not toxic. However, the needles from pine trees and artificial trees are sharp and can cause trauma, if ingested. Cedar contains irritants and should not be used. Decorations made of plastic such as some angel hair, tinsel, spray snow and ornaments are non-toxic. However, ingesting pieces of them can cause blockage of the intestinal tract. Some angel hair is made of fiberglass which is very dangerous if eaten. If you use a spray-on decoration, keep your birds away while you spray. Some of the propellants contain Freon. Glass and metallic ornaments and lights hung on Christmas trees can be broken. The sharp edges can cause cuts, both externally and internally. Bubbling light fluid contains a toxic solvent which irritates eyes. Consider using wooden ornaments and edible garlands made of things like popcorn, cranberries or even colored paper. Electrical cords are another source of danger. Avoid metallic wrapping papers which can contain heavy metals. Eating any kind of wrapping paper should be avoided to prevent the possibility of intestinal blockage.

**Visitors** - Holidays also mean visitors, activity, late nights and noise. Visitors may unknowingly feed your bird something toxic such as alcohol, coffee, avocado and chocolate. Watch for your birds reactions to individuals. Some may be frightening to them. If you think your birds may become stressed, then move their cages or playgyms to a quieter area. Take them out, when things are quiet and there are less people around.