Summer road trip with your pet?

What you need to know about pets and distracted driving

Summer is a season of travel. More people hit the road during the warmer months, whether to visit friends and family, explore new places, or go on outdoor adventures. And the good news is, many summer travelers are bringing their pets along. But are pet parents taking enough precautions to keep everyone in their car safe?

The perils of distracted driving

We often think nothing of adjusting our GPS system, changing our music, or petting our furry passenger while we drive, but the implications of taking our eyes off the road, our hands off the wheel, or our minds off of driving, can be very serious. According to the Center for Disease Control, or CDC, distracted driving and a failure to pay attention to road and traffic conditions cause 25 to 30 percent of police-reported traffic crashes, which add up to roughly 1.2 million crashes each year. In addition, the National Highway Traffic Administration, or NHTSA, notes that roughly 20 percent of car accident injuries involve distracted driving.

Distracted driving and pets

Distracted driving is of most concern in summer, when it typically reaches its peak as more younger drivers take to the road, and more people in general take the opportunity to travel, explore, or visit family. Traveling with pets compounds this concern, as unrestrained pets can both cause distractions and make accidents more dangerous.

"Pets can easily take a driver's attention from the road, posing a serious risk not only to the pet but also to the passengers riding in the same vehicle," says Michael Leung, co-founder and lead product designer of Sleepypod, a manufacturer of premium pet carriers and pet restraint systems. "If there is nothing restraining a pet in a hard stop or car accident, the pet can become a projectile and

potentially collide with fellow pets or human passengers."

Such a collision could be catastrophic, regardless of a pet's size. A 10-pound dog in a 50-mile-an-hour car crash exerts 500 pounds of force. Meanwhile, an 80-pound dog in a 30-mile-per-hour crash exerts 2,400 pounds of force.

Unrestrained pets may also fall or jump out of open windows or flee the car in fear after a crash, potentially becoming lost, injured, or worse.

Keeping pets safe with restraints

A quality, rigorously tested pet restraint can make all the difference in preventing distracted driving and keeping human and pet passengers safe during an accident. Interestingly, an American Automobile Association (AAA) survey found that, while more than 80 percent of drivers admitted that they recognize the dangers of driving with an unrestrained pet, only 16 percent used pet restraints.

"Hopefully, you'll never have to put a car restraint for your pet to the test," says Michael, "But taking an extra minute to properly secure a pet before heading on the road for summer adventures could offer peace of mind and reassurance."

Best practices for pet restraint

Michael spearheaded Sleepypod's rigorous advanced crash-testing program, which includes a large and growing family of crash test dummy dogs and cats featuring sensors and monitors that measure car crash and pet restraint data. In addition, he and his research and development team gather real-life accident data through Sleepypod's Crash Replacement Program, which offers customers who have used a pet safety restraint while in an accident replacement pet restraints or discounts on new pet restraints.

Michael offers the following tips for minimizing pet-related distractions and keeping pets safe during accidents:

- Pets should always be restrained in a back seat to prevent them from injury if an airbag is deployed.
- If you cannot restrain your pet with a reputable, tested car restraint, the next safest option is to place your pet in the footwell behind the front seat.
- Smaller pets are safer when fully contained in a restrained carrier, while larger dogs should ride in a car safety harness that does not connect the pet with an extension tether.
- Pets should be unable to slide forward far enough to "submarine," or drop off the seat, at any point during a collision.

Securing pets is the best way to ensure you and your pets have happy, distraction-free travels during summer, and all year round.

Author: Kim Salerno, CEO/Founder TripsWithPets, Inc.

Aquatic plants are essential to lake and river health

Aquatic plants form the foundation of healthy and flourishing lake ecosystems - both within lakes and rivers and on the shores around them. They not only protect water quality, but they also produce life-giving oxygen. Aquatic plants are a lake's own filtering system, helping to clarify the water by absorbing nutrients like phosphorus and nitrogen that could stimulate algal blooms. Plant beds stabilize soft lake and river bottoms and reduce shoreline erosion by reducing the effect of waves and current. Healthy native aquatic plant communities help prevent the establishment of invasive non-native plants like Eurasian water-milfoil, purple loosestrife or phragmites.

It makes sense that the best fishing spots are typically near aquatic plant beds. Aquatic plants provide important reproductive, food, and cover habitat for fish, invertebrates and wildlife. It's aquatic plants that fashion a nursery for all sorts of creatures ranging from birds to beaver to bass to bugs. In order to maintain healthy lakes and rivers, we must maintain healthy native aquatic plant communities.

In most instances, control of native aquatic plants is discouraged or should be limited to high use recreational areas that are next to piers and docks or within navigational channels. In some cases there may be penalties for improper removal of aquatic plants.

Aquatic Plant Management

In order to protect diverse and stable communities of native aquatic plants and prevent the spread of invasive aquatic plants, many aquatic plant management and nuisance control activities require a permit issued by the DNR. Please contact your local aquatic plant management coordinator before engaging in any aquatic plant management or nuisance control activities.

Permits are needed for aquatic plant control when:

chemicals are used (NR 107, Wis. Adm. Code [PDF exit DNR], WPDES);

biological controls are used (NR 107, Wis. Adm. Code [PDF exit DNR]);

physical techniques (e.g., drawdown or bottom plant barrier) are used (Ch. 30/31);

wild rice is involved;

plants are removed mechanically (NR 109, Wis. Adm. Code [PDF exit DNR]); or

plants are removed manually from an area greater than 30 feet in width along the shore (NR 109, Wis. Adm. Code)

Additionally, it is illegal to transport boats or boating equipment that has aquatic plants or zebra mussels attached. Introductions of aquatic plants for planting require a permit.

There are many different ways to manage aquatic plants in Wisconsin, ranging from hand-pulling plants through large-scale harvesting or herbicide treatments. The best management strategy will be different for each lake. It depends on which nuisance species need to be controlled and how widespread the problem is and the other plants and wildlife in the lake. Even things like what activities occur on the lake and upstream in the watershed might affect your strategy. Keep in mind that each lake's management plan may also change over time. It is important to have a conversation with your local aquatic plant management coordinator if you are considering management of aquatic plants on your lake. You can also find some helpful resources through the following resources.

UW-Extension: Aquatic Plant Management Guide

University of Florida: Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants

Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation: Biology and Control of Aquatic Plants - A Best Management Practices Handbook

The DNR conducted a strategic analysis of aquatic plant management in Wisconsin to inform future discussions and decision-making. Visit the strategic analysis webpage for more information.

Aquatic Plant Protection

Aquatic plant protection begins with us. We need to work to maintain good water quality and healthy native aquatic plant communities. How can we do it? The first step is to limit the amount of nutrients and sediment that enter the lake. There are other important ways to safeguard a lake's native aquatic plant community. They may include developing motorboat ordinances that prevent the destruction of native plant beds, limiting aquatic plant removal activities, designating certain plant beds as Critical Habitat sites and preventing the spread of invasive plants, such as Eurasian water-milfoil.

If plant management is needed, it is usually in lakes that humans have significantly altered. If we discover how to live on lakes in harmony with natural environments and how to use aquatic plant management techniques that blend with natural processes rather than resist them, the forecast for healthy lake ecosystems looks bright.