Halloween Tips for Pets and Their People

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Don Hanson
Green Acres Kennel Shop
945-6841

[***Bangor***]— Halloween is that time of year when many children and even some adults like to dress up in costumes that make them look different and often scary. They may also take on the stilted walk or the pseudo-terrifying vocalizations of the character they are portraying.

Now think about Halloween and all of the shenanigans it entails from your pet's perspective. Was your dog ever socialized/habituated to anything remotely like Halloween? Is it likely that they will find groups of people behaving weirdly and trying to scare one another a pleasant experience? You already know that the answer to both questions, for most pets, is a resounding "No!" Do your pets a favor this Halloween and keep them inside and safe.

You and your children also want to be cautious when out trick-or-treating as you may encounter dogs that will find you frightening which may cause them to bark and growl at you.

Tips for You and Your Pets

- Black cats, due to the mythology about them and Halloween, should be kept inside and safe, well in advance of and after the Halloween holiday. Sadly, black cats can become victims of violence or may be abducted to be someone's costume accessory.
- Dressing your pet in a costume may be fun for you but may be a very stressful experience for your pet. If your dog freezes in place, or frantically tries to get out of the costume, or exhibits any calming signals (tongue flicks, yawns, etc.), your dog would probably prefer to remain "au naturel" (without costume).
- Secure your pet in a part of your home where they will be behind a closed door and away from the commotion of a party or the trick-or-treaters coming to your door. Pets could easily bolt through an open door if they are frightened and are often injured if left outdoors by Halloween pranksters. The frenetic activity of a party, especially where people are dressed oddly and acting unusually is often frightening to our pets.
- If you are having people over for Halloween, make sure everyone at the party knows that they are to respect your pets and just "let them be." If your dog enjoys their crate, you may even want to crate

them with a stuffed Kong or another favorite chew toy, far from the maddening crowd. It may even be helpful to play some soothing music or leave the radio on in the room with your pets to help mask the sounds of your party and activity at the front door.

- If your dog is reactive to your doorbell either disconnect it or be waiting at the door, so the trick-or-treaters do not need to ring the bell or knock on your door.
- Candy is prevalent at Halloween, and anything containing chocolate or the artificial sweeter Xylitol can be very toxic to your pets. Make sure to keep all candy out of reach of your pets.
- If you are taking your children trick-or-treating, I'd strongly encourage you to leave your dog at home as described above. They will be far happier.

Tips for Parents and Kids

- When trick-or-treating, avoid houses if you can hear a dog barking behind the door, if you can see a dog at the door or windows or if you see a dog tied in the yard or barking from behind a fence.
- Never approach any dog, even if you know him. He may not recognize you in your costume.
- If a homeowner opens their door and you see a dog there, remain still and wait for the dog owner to put their dog away. You can tell them that you do not want to interact with their dog. Do not move towards the person or the dog, wait for them to come to you and give you their treat and then wait for them to close the door before you turn away and leave.
- If a dog runs at you while out trick-or-treating, stop and stand still and "Be A Tree" (hold your hands folded in front of you with your eyes looking at your feet). The dog will probably sniff you and move on. Wait for the dog's owner or another adult to come and get the dog before you turn away. If no adult is around, wait for the dog to go away.
- It is best to ignore other people's dogs on Halloween if you encounter them while out walking. The dog may be anxious about all the people and the costumes they are wearing. Even if you know the dog, he may not recognize you in your costume.

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