

Topical Dilemma: The Safety of Tick Products

There have been several reports in the media about the safety of using topical spot-on pesticides on dogs and cats for flea and tick control. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is intensifying its evaluation of these products to determine if further restrictions on their use should be implemented to better protect pets and people.

The use of pesticides has always been a concern for all of us who care about our environment and the health of our loved ones. In a perfect world, we would be able to find holistic remedies for many of the problems created by the insects that are vectors for disease. We would also like to remove threats like the Salem Power Plant and guarantee that the water we drink is free from chemical contamination.

Unfortunately, sometimes we have to make compromises when given the choice between pesticide use and the threat that an insect borne disease can create. We all are aware that the ideal medical mantra is “first do no harm”. After careful consideration of all the information available to us, veterinarians have to consider which recommendation is in the best interest of patient and client.

The most compelling reason for using flea and tick prevention is the threat of tick born disease. I diagnose Lyme Disease and Anaplasmosis on a weekly basis. We live in an endemic area for these diseases and I experience the devastating effects they have on pets and people. Therefore, at the

present time, I consider the use of the pesticides to be in the pet's best interest provided the pet owning public follows certain guidelines and strictly adheres to the instructions on the label.

In 2008 there were 44,000 potential incidents reported to the EPA associated with topically applied products. Both over the counter and veterinarian dispensed products are under investigation. Manufacturers believe that most of the problems are caused by improper use of label directions.

In the mean time, pet owners need to justify the use flea and tick products. I recommend the following guidelines.

- 1. Determine the degree of risk. Obviously, pets that are almost exclusively kept indoors need not worry about tick infestation.**
- 2. Pets that have contact with the outside environment should be protected. Even pets confined to yards that have a proximity to woods need to be protected.**
- 3. Be aware of other pets licking the product. They are not meant to ingested. Cats are especially sensitive.**
- 4. Use latex gloves when applying the products and prevent children from touching the application area.**

5. Carefully read the instructions for use. The products are labeled according to a pet's weight. If the range of the weight on a product is 25-50 pounds and your dog weighs 26 pounds, I would recommend you not use the entire contents of the monthly application.

At the present time, the use of topically applied pesticides is the commonly recommended remedy for controlling fleas and ticks on pets. Most reported incidents are minor. Continue to monitor any new research and investigations of these products. Consult with your veterinarian if you suspect the product is causing an undesirable reaction.