

Antifreeze Will Kill a Dog (and almost did – happy ending)

[An estimated up to 90,000 pets per year in the U.S. are poisoned by licking antifreeze.](#)

This is a deleted scene from my forthcoming book, *The Dog Who Took Me Up a Mountain*. In addition to being an important story, it could be life-saving for a dog owner's pet.

One winter my friend Rick Peckham came to stay with my wife Pamela and me. Rick is a great climbing friend, as well as a retired Air Force Special Operations Pararescue specialist and a paramedic. One snowy morning we had our two dogs outside, Emme and her buddy Alfie. Rick noticed that both Emme and Alfie were licking the snow. He went over and saw they were licking at a blueish-green stain he suspected was antifreeze, probably from the garbage truck that had been by earlier that day. He told Pamela right away which triggered all her alarms. Pamela is an expert on most dog-related issues and knew that if it was antifreeze, it would soon be deadly for the dogs in a horrendous way.

Antifreeze is 95% ethylene glycol and is lethal to animals. Engine coolant and hydraulic brake fluids also contain ethylene glycol. A leak of any of these fluids should be a red alert if pets are around, as ethylene glycol has a sweet taste that attracts animals and encourages them to lick it. As little as one tablespoon can cause acute kidney failure in dogs by crystallizing. Once that happens, the damage cannot be repaired. It is a cruel and painful death.

Antifreeze is Lethal, Get to the Vet

Dogs caught in the act of drinking or licking antifreeze have the best chance of survival because the owner can tell the vet what needs to be treated, and they can be taken to the vet before symptoms develop. Getting treatment in the first few hours is critical as the crystals don't begin to form immediately. The vet may do a stomach pump where water is pumped into the dog's stomach and then drained to wash out the toxins. The vet may also administer Fomepizole intravenously through a tap in the dog's leg.

Oh man, now I'm getting into blood and guts, which is not my thing, but this is about my Emme.

Pamela kicked into action: she scooped some of the blue snow into a plastic bag, threw the dogs into the car, and drove with Rick at high speed right to the vet.

The vet wasn't especially concerned at first, saying: *"Oh they probably didn't lick enough if it was mixed in the snow."*

Well, that brought out Pamela's warrior personality that I've learned to avoid at all costs.

"How do you know how much they ingested?" was her opening salvo.

Vet: *"Well, I guess I don't."*

Pamela: *"Then how can you possibly know if it wasn't enough to kill them?"*

The vet quickly sensed she was "weapons hot" and reached for the Fomepizole. He saw that he had a limited supply, only enough for a couple of dogs. Pamela left no doubt in anyone's mind that our two dogs were going to get all of it. While he was prepping the dogs, Pamela took the bag with the blue snow to the gas station next door. They readily confirmed it was antifreeze.

Nightmare Not Over

Pamela and Rick brought Emme and Alfie home, each with an IV tap in a leg and a bag with the Fomepizole being fed intravenously. We all sat around talking about the incident. Meanwhile, Emme was being her normal impossible self. She was not happy about the IV in her leg and she picked at it. We managed to keep her away from it for a while, but in a moment when I wasn't looking, she ripped the tube out of the port and blood started gushing out of the tap in her leg.

Oh Lord, then we were into my worst nightmare scenario. Blood was squirting, and I turned the color of antifreeze. I didn't know if just the IV tube had pulled out or if the entire port had come out of her vein. I didn't faint; that's about the only good thing I can say about my reaction. Rick, on the other hand, said calmly "*get me some adhesive tape.*" I ran to grab the tape, relieved to be somewhere else. He grabbed Emme firmly, pulled out the port, pressed on the vessel to stop the bleeding, and then applied gauze and tape. I needed a drink, and fortunately my bar was within arms' reach.

Pamela and I took the dogs to an animal hospital that had more Fomepizole. They put a new contraption on Emme's leg with much firmer wrapping and refilled Alfie's bag. I was busy trying not to go horizontal on the floor. We brought the dogs home and committed to a nervous watch for any symptoms. After two days, they showed no distress from the poison, the ports came out, and we dodged the bullet. ***An estimated up to 90,000 pets per year in the U.S. are poisoned by licking antifreeze.***



Alfie (left) went on to win the Australian terrier breed at Westminster; All Emme cared about was hiking and climbing with her Dad.

I felt so thankful that Rick spotted the dogs licking an unknown spot in the snow and that Pamela knew the danger and kicked into fast action. I had a lot to be thankful for, and I wanted every dog owner to know about the danger.

Holding the Garbage Company Responsible

I reported the problem to the garbage company. I told them to fix their truck, because they could be killing other dogs in the neighborhoods they served. I then notified our homeowner's association to tell other neighbors to be on the lookout for blue spots on their driveways.

The bills came in from the vet and animal hospital. They were north of \$2000. Pamela was dedicated to making the garbage company pay, so she told them about the bills. They retorted that they checked their trucks and found no problems, so whatever spot she was talking about must have been from someone else's car. It was a classic standoff of "he said, she said" except that the "she" in this case was my wife Pamela, and she was pissed.

Then I remembered, maybe I had something positive to contribute to this mess. I am a high-tech guy and when I built our house, I loaded it up with all kinds of control systems, programmable everything, including motion-activated recording video cameras on the outside of the house. Could it be? I looked, and indeed one of the cameras was pointing to the area where the garbage truck stopped in the driveway.

I hopped on my PC, connected to the camera's hard drive and clicked through the time-stamped recording segments back to the time in question. I saw the garbage truck pull up and stop so the guys could load up the garbage. I watched the truck pull away, and while it was still in view, I thought I saw the spot in the snow. The camera system lets me take a still image from the video, which I did. I blew it up to three-times zoom, and there was the spot in full color!

My fingers were tingling. This was as good as any detective show. It reminded me of a great old film called *Blowup*, a 1966 British-Italian mystery-thriller film directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. It was about a fashion photographer who had unwittingly captured a murder on film, a truth revealed after doing an extreme blow up of the print.

I had a photo of the truck seconds away from the spot when it was white, and seconds removed when it was blue, and both images were time stamped by the system. It doesn't get any better than that. I called the garbage company, emailed the photos, and a few days later a \$2500 check showed up in the mail.

Of course, I then switched to a garbage pickup company that knew exactly what I was talking about. They said that for that very reason they check their trucks every few months for leaks.

I believe we saved our dogs and possibly some other dogs' lives in our neighborhood that day. And if we save one dog by spreading this story, it will be worth it.

Read more about my adventures with Emme in my book *The Dog Who Took Me Up a Mountain*, releasing on October 8, 2019 and [available for preorder now](#).

