

HELOISE

Electrical cords can injure pets

Dear Heloise: Rabbits and puppies are notorious for chewing things, and if they chew on electrical cords, there is a chance of it causing a house fire or electrocution.

One afternoon while watching my rabbit, Sunny, exercise in our living room, I noticed him start to chew on an electrical cord. I grabbed him immediately and put him back in his cage. I remembered seeing a plastic cap that slips over electrical cords in an electronics store. I bought up a couple of them to cover all the cords that are lying on the floor.

Sunny is safe now, so when I let him run around, there is no chance that he will chew the cord.

We make our homes safe for children, and it is also important for pet owners to check around the house to make it safe for them. — J.S., via e-mail

Dear Heloise: Bathing my dog, No-No, is not the highlight of my day, but I do have to do it so often.

I have the utility sink in my garage at a perfect height and I use a spray attachment. I put a waffle-type shelf liner in the bottom of the sink so he can't slide. I also have an old TV screen that I kept for a spare. I stand it on a slant in the sink, and No-No grabs it and really stays put through his bath.

Hopefully, this will help others with their cats. — Reader, San Antonio

Readers: Hamsters are wonderful pets, especially apartment dwellers. They don't bark or meow, don't need a lot of exercise and can keep themselves entertained by playing with an exercise wheel.

They can be aggressive, especially males and females, so I would recommend that just one is kept in an apartment. Also, there is the issue of unwanted babies. Males and females are to be kept apart.

Exercise is important, so unless you have a large apartment, you should let your hamster out of its cage for a few minutes each day. If you have a large apartment, you can let your hamster out of its cage for a few minutes each day. If you have a large apartment, you can let your hamster out of its cage for a few minutes each day.

Binge drinking at college is still a big problem

Dear Annie: As children pack for college this month, parents will worry about their safety. An American Medical Association study found that one aspect of college life which parents worry about is binge drinking.

It's true that drinking is often considered a rite of passage for many college students, but it is one that can severely disrupt student life, the college environment and the surrounding neighborhoods. About 1,400 college students die each year from alcohol-related injuries.

For nearly 10 years, research from the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study has consistently shown the damage a drink can do. Binge drinking is defined as five drinks in a row for a man, four for a woman. At the center of binge drinking are the fraternities, sororities and intercollegiate sports. Here are some startling statistics from our latest survey of 10,000 students at 119 colleges:

- 75 percent of fraternity and sorority house residents binge drink.

- 57 percent of male and 48 percent of female athletes are binge drinkers.

- 54 percent of college students living off campus without their parents were binge drinkers.

- 48 percent of all the alcohol college students drink is consumed by those below the legal drinking age.

Some would have you believe that the problem isn't widespread and that there have been major successes in curbing it. However, the overall binge-drinking rate has remained at 44 percent for eight years running.

Unpleasant facts are hard to face, but we cannot begin to address this problem until we admit that it exists. For more information on college binge drinking, visit www.hsph.harvard.edu/cas. — Henry

ANNIE'S MAILBOX

Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar

Wechsler, Ph.D., Director, Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Studies

Dear Dr. Wechsler: Thank you for writing. While some fraternities, sororities and athletic organizations have taken steps to deal with alcohol abuse, many others look the other way. Too bad.

Dear Annie: I have been married to Phyllis for 16 years. I love her, but I cannot stand the way her family talks about me. What's worse, Phyllis encourages them to think poorly of me.

We recently spent a week at my parents' summer house. As soon as we returned home, Phyllis got on the phone to her mother complaining endlessly about how I ignored her and spent too much time with my parents. This isn't true. I took Phyllis shopping, for long walks and out to dinner. She told me repeatedly that she was having a wonderful time.

Phyllis bad-mouths me to her folks, and when they criticize me, she doesn't come to my defense. I've asked Phyllis to see a marriage counselor, but she refuses. Now what? — Fed Up in Georgia

Dear Fed Up: Now you see the counselor without her. Phyllis needs to show more respect for you and for your marriage. A counselor can help you work through these issues and make some decisions about your future. Sixteen years is a big investment and ought to be worth saving. Get going.

■ Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, veteran editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@creators.com, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045.