

Pet Travel Tips

Travel Safely and Lawfully with Your Pet

Traveling with your dog can be a very enjoyable experience. Below we have provided some helpful information to make your trip in your truck or car a safe one for both you and your pet.

RESTRAINING YOUR DOG IN YOUR CAR

The Risk. Unable to brace themselves against swerves and turns, animals in cars and trucks can be thrown against dashboards, windows or floors. A slam on the brakes at 30 mph means a 50 pound dog could lunge forward with a force equivalent to being pushed by almost nine 170 pound men, safety researchers have calculated. The American Automobile Association (AAA) estimates pets moving about in cars as the third worst distraction while driving. A recent survey by the Royal Auto Club found that nearly all drivers who traveled with their pets had been distracted by them at least once, and about 11 percent of those drivers admitted the distraction almost caused a crash. A tiny lapse in focus on the road is all it takes.

For your safety and your dog's, buckle him or her into a special pet seatbelt. Automobile pet restraining devices can be purchased at most pet store and are inexpensive. Crates or sturdy pet carriers are also an effective way to restrain pets, especially cats, in cars. Make sure to secure the crate so it does not shift in the event of a sudden stop. Barriers can also be used to keep dogs in the back seat and are sold in pet supply stores and catalogs.

Drivers should not allow pets to sit in their laps or in the front seat. Pets riding in the front seat can be thrown into the windshield if the driver has to make a sudden stop. Also, the pet can climb on to the driver's lap and interfere with driving or get in the way of the gas and brake pedals. In Massachusetts, it is against the law for an operator of a motor vehicle to allow anything in or on the vehicle that "may interfere with or impede the proper operation of the vehicle..."

Protect your dogs eyes and ears. If your dog rides in the back of a pickup truck or convertible or is allowed to stick his or her head out the window, this can cause injuries, resulting from debris hitting your dog's eyes and ears. Also paws stepping on power window buttons can close the window on your dog's neck.

AVOID TRANSPORTING ANIMALS IN OPEN-BED TRUCKS

The law. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, California, Maine, Oregon, Washington, Florida and Rhode Island restrict dogs from trucks or open vehicles. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 90 Section 22H states that no person shall transport any animal in the back of a motor vehicle in a space intended for any load on the vehicle on a public way unless:

- the space is enclosed or has side and tail racks to a height of at least 46 inches extending vertically from the floor;
- the animal is cross-tethered to the vehicle (simple, inexpensive cross-tethering devices are sold at pet-supply stores for \$15-\$40);
- the animal is protected by a secured container or cage;
- or the animal is otherwise protected in a manner that will prevent the animal from being thrown or from falling or jumping from the vehicle.

Violation of this law is punishable by a fine not less than \$50. In addition, transporting your animals in an unsafe manner may also, in certain circumstances, constitute criminal animal cruelty pursuant to Mass. General Laws Chapter 272 Section 77.

Prior to this law passing in 1998, in a statewide survey, **71 percent of Massachusetts veterinarians reported having treated animals (mostly dogs) injured as a result of riding unsecured and unprotected in the back of open-bed vehicles.** This resulted in more than 600 dogs being injured while transported in this unsafe manner.

If truck bed transport is necessary,

use a pet harness that encircles shoulders and rib cage (not just a neck collar). Attach the harness to a cross-tether, which hooks to a truck anchor on each side. Most pets will actually feel more comfortable and secure when they are restrained.

DO NOT LEAVE PETS IN PARKED CARS ON HOT OR SUNNY DAYS

In warm weather, or in cooler weather but parked in direct sunlight, temperatures inside cars can rise to dangerously high levels in minutes.

- An interior temperature can heat up to 100F in 10 minutes on an 80F day - even with the windows slightly open.
- Pets can suffer needlessly and could die when left in a car even on a moderately hot day.
- Causing an animal to be subjected to unnecessary cruelty or suffering is illegal in Massachusetts and is punishable by imprisonment for up to one year and a fine of up to \$1,000.

OTHER HELPFUL HINTS FOR CAR TRAVEL WITH YOUR DOG

- Bring a dish and some water for your dog.
- Carry a first aid kit in your car.
- For long road trips, give yourself and your pet a rest stop every two or three hours.
- Avoid leaving a dog in a car alone to avoid the risk of theft, tow, and heat injuries (see previous section on hot cars).