

Statement of Dr. Melinda Eyrich, DVM  
On Behalf of the American Veterinary Medical Association  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials  
Tuesday, May 23, 2006

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify before the committee today.

My name is Dr. Melinda Eyrich; I have been a veterinarian for the past 15 years, focusing on emergency medicine for the past 7 years. I am the owner of Urgent Care Veterinary Hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

When I was asked to speak today, I was also asked to reflect on specific cases of antifreeze poisoning. One case in particular jumped into my mind. An 8 year old male Golden Retriever. He presented in the fall of the year, unable to raise his head but he could still weakly wag his tail. He was in kidney failure. The test for the presence of ethylene glycol in his system was strongly positive.

On the other side of the exam table from me were two young boys, in tears, over their sick friend. Their approximate ages were 10 and 12 years old. I gave the family a very poor prognosis for recovery. The decision was made to try and save this important family member. As we worked to save him over the next three days, the two boys

recalled countless stories of how he had shared their youth. In their young eyes, This Golden Retriever had shared their entire lives. He had played fetch, swam and slept on their beds. This friend had waited loyally for them to return on the bus at the end of each day.

The most effective treatment for ethylene glycol poisoning is very expensive. I am not able to mark up the drug we use because, at approximately three hundred dollars a vial, the expense is prohibitive to most families. At the end of three tear-filled and heart wrenching days—in the face of worsening lab results—we could not save this family member.

These boys witnessed a horrible painful death until the difficult decision was made to euthanize their friend. When the younger boy asked why antifreeze kills dogs, I initially started to explain the clinical reason for the kidney failure it causes. Part way into my explanation, he interrupted me and reworded his question so that I understood that what he was really asking is why do we have something so commonly around that kills dogs. I remember him saying “everyone has it”. I tried to explain that was not its intended use and that his friend’s death was an accident. He replied "that does not make it all right."

He was correct. The events of this world can be hard enough to explain to children. If we have a chance to lessen some of the wrongs, and make them right, we should act.

The addition of an agent to make antifreeze taste bitter appears to be a practical simple solution, to a very deadly killer. This type of toxicity is not only emotionally taxing for families but a financial hardship as well – usually in the face of a guarded prognosis. I would love to be able to never dread the change of seasons, when well-meaning people change their antifreeze and do not dispose of it safely. It would be a celebration to never lose a friend to something that could be made preventable.

Thank you.