

Chicago Tribune

Frostbitten cat a reminder of cold's danger to pets

BY **DAWN RHODES**

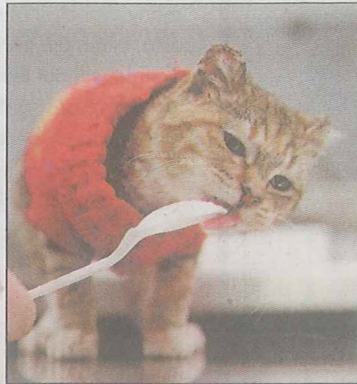
Tribune reporter

As Chicagoans struggle through the season's first serious blast of cold weather this week, a small cat named Sunny has a much-needed refuge.

City workers recently picked up 1-year-old Sunny wandering around 8600 South Colfax Avenue and brought her to Chicago's animal control center. Animal shelter PAWS Chicago took in the multicolored kitty Monday.

Sunny now is at the PAWS facility in the Little Village neighborhood being treated for frostbitten ears, according to spokeswoman Sarah Ahlberg. She also needed to be shaved to remove her badly matted fur and is severely underweight at only 2½ pounds.

"We unfortunately see that quite often during these months," Ahlberg said. "We're trying to figure out why she's so under-



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Sunny, the 1-year-old stray rescued from the street, is now on the mend at PAWS Chicago.

weight at 1 year old, so we're going to run some bloodwork on her. But she's doing splendidly."

PAWS rescues about 6,000 animals a year, most of which are transfers from the city's animal control center. Ahlberg said the

shelter sees more strays in the summertime because it is kitten season and because animals spending more time outdoors can get loose. But stray dogs and cats suffer in the cold weather and often are stricken with hypothermia and frostbite, as Sunny was.

Chicago residents can call 311 or fill out an online form to report animals that appear to be homeless.

"It would be helpful to give them a chance to help them find an indoor home," Ahlberg said.

Animal control advocates urge pet owners to vigilantly protect their dogs and cats from the cold.

City animal control officials say dogs and cats are best off being indoors and that low wind chills, like those hitting the area this week, can be life-threatening for pets. Dogs with short hair are particularly vulnerable and may need a sweater when taken outside. Owners also should wipe off

their pets' paws after a walk because road salt can hurt their pads and their mouths if they lick it.

Outdoor dogs still need protection from the cold with an adequately sized doghouse and more food than usual, according to city officials.

PAWS Chicago further recommends that owners never leave pets alone in a car. Owners should contact their veterinarian if their pets show signs of hypothermia or frostbite, such as shivering, breathing problems and shriveled skin.

As for Sunny, PAWS will continue to treat her, but she cannot be adopted until the city's stray hold expires, giving any owners time to step forward and claim her. Otherwise she could be available for adoption after a few weeks, Ahlberg said.

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