

Global Warming and Frenchies

Though some continue to deny that human activities are the cause, it is obvious that global climate change is upon us and is rapidly worsening. This is causing not just warmer temperatures around the world, but more extreme and violent weather patterns year around.

What are the implications of climate change for dogs ... especially French Bulldogs and other brachycephalic breeds?

Most importantly for short-faced dogs, we are experiencing increasingly high temperatures even in areas unaccustomed to severe heat, where people often do not have air conditioned homes or cars. Since Frenchies and other brachycephalic dogs have inefficient cooling mechanisms because of their compromised airways, high temperatures can be fatal for them, and owners must plan ahead for ways to keep their dogs safe during extremely hot weather.

Severe summer storms can cause power outages when downed trees fall on power lines, and it can take days to restore power. Even if you have an air conditioned home and don't live in a region where such storms are common, increased demand for electricity is resulting in more power brownouts and blackouts on hot days when the demand for electricity is high. Consider what would happen if you were away from home during a day when temperatures were in the triple digits and the air conditioning should fail for any reason. The closed house would rapidly become an oven, and you would be unaware of it until you returned home and found your dogs dying or dead.

If you have a basement which remains cool even when the air conditioning is off, arrange an area there where you could leave your dogs on extremely hot days, in case the A/C failed while you were away from home. If you don't have a basement (or even if you do), consider buying a pet safety temperature alarm of the sort used in RV's to warn when the temperature inside exceeds a given level. Those alarms can summon you on your cell phone (though you may need to give a key to someone else who could go to the house if you are unable to do so). An alarm of this sort would probably need to be modified to run off a battery, as the RV ones generally operate on the cigarette lighter in the vehicle.

Other precautions include using only wire crates with good air circulation instead of the plastic shipping kennels; providing "cool coats" and "cool crate pads" and crate fans; having a child's wading pool available for the dog. Frenchies with "brachycephalic syndrome" problems (stenotic nares, elongated soft palate, and secondary changes such as everted laryngeal ventricles) should have these problems surgically corrected if possible to give the dog the best airway possible to meet the challenges of hotter temperatures.

Other side effects of global climate change (droughts, more numerous and more severe wildfires, more violent and severe storms) will create additional challenges for pet owners. Following Hurricane Katrina we all read numerous articles on disaster preparedness for pets. To the more obvious threats should be added extreme hot weather.