

Bird Safety Corner

Miscellaneous Household Hazards, Part 1

There are many household hazards for birds, some of which were covered in other columns. Here are a few more you may not have thought of before.

Electrical cords are everywhere in our homes and can cause all kinds of problems. Curious beaks can chew through a cord in no time flat, leading to **electrocution**. Some birds may lightly nibble at cords over time until the one fatal day they reach the electrified core. Electrical wires are usually made of thin **copper wire** coated with rubber or plastic for insulation, though occasionally they contain lead. If the copper core is exposed and swallowed, it can perforate a bird's stomach or intestines. If there is **lead** in the insulation, it will be toxic to a bird if swallowed. The **prongs** on the end of the cords are made of either steel or brass and coated with zinc, nickel, or tin, so make sure your bird does not nibble on these either. Whether or not an electrical cord is plugged in, it is hazardous to your bird, so keep busy beaks away from it!



Kitty litter is a staple in houses with cats. While most people know that cats should not be around birds, they don't realize that kitty litter is also hazardous to birds. Kitty litter is most often made of clay, which swells to 15 times its volume with liquid. While that makes it very effective as kitty litter, it can be deadly to a bird, causing **intestinal impaction**. Silica gel litters are even more absorbant and dangerous. Diatomaceous earth litter does not swell as much, but is abrasive. Biodegradable litter made from plant products such as pine wood pellets, recycled newspaper, clumping sawdust, barley, or dried orange peel, is probably safest. Kitty litter is very attractive to a bird and can be swallowed easily. All kitty litter should be kept where birds cannot get at it. Since cats should also be kept away from birds, this should not pose a problem. Remember to make sure that no kitty litter is tracked into the room where your birds are since even a small amount swallowed can be deadly. On a side note, some people use kitty litter on ice-covered driveways and walkways. Remember that this is hazardous to wild birds for the same reasons listed above.

Mini-blinds are quite common in most homes and not usually thought of as hazardous, but remember that the cords look very enticing to parrots. Like other strings, the **cords** can wrap around feet, legs, and necks, and a panicky bird can easily **strangle**. Some mini-blind cords release easily, so if a bird tugs on them, it's possible that they could rise abruptly, trapping a bird. When child-proofing a home, experts recommend tying the cords up out of a toddler's reach. With birds, however, nothing's ever totally out of reach!

Mini-blinds are most commonly made of aluminum, vinyl, wood, or fabric and may have **coatings** toxic to birds. Millions of **vinyl mini-blinds** imported from China, Taiwan, Mexico, and Indonesia were found in 1996 to use **lead** to stabilize the plastic. The plastic deteriorated over time with exposure to sunlight and heat, releasing lead dust on the surface of the blinds. New safety standards went into effect in 1996 eliminating lead from production, but **mini-blinds produced before mid-1996** can be assumed to have lead in them. If you have old vinyl mini-blinds in your house, they should be replaced before your bird can chew on them. Ways to remove the blinds and clean the area can be found here:



www.state.nj.us/health/eohap/lead/lead_miniblinds.shtml

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