

## Cheat Grass Alert

Summer in Idaho is cheat grass season, and it is already here.

What is cheat grass? “Cheat” otherwise known as *Bromus tectorum* is a fast growing grass-like plant that covers most of the Great Basin area of the United States, Idaho included. It can grow up to 2 feet tall. It is found on rangeland, the local foothills, empty lots, land lining irrigation ditches, and anywhere that it can gain a foothold.

It is easily identified by its long thin cascade of narrow, sharp seeds.



These seeds easily grab onto fur, clothing or even skin. These seeds are especially insidious due to their arrow-like shape – they move forward in the direction they point, but rarely move backward due to the flare of the back of the seed. They can get lodged between toes, in ear canals, under 3<sup>rd</sup> eyelids and many other sensitive areas. They can also be inhaled.

If your dog exercises in areas with cheat, be sure to check them thoroughly at the end of the session and remove any cheat. Shaving long coats short can reduce cheat awn collection and make finding cheat on the fur easier.

If your dog suddenly starts shaking their head or scratching at their ears, an otoscopic exam should be done to look for and remove any cheat within the ear canal. The cheat awns are sharp enough to puncture the ear drum.

Cheat left between the toes can puncture the skin and cause a local swelling and infection. If your dog starts to lick at one or more of their paws, check for any swellings. If you find any, then a cheat grass is likely imbedded and should be professionally removed.

Cheat caught beneath the third eyelid can scratch the cornea and cause extreme pain.

Cheat grass problems should be addressed promptly since it can not only puncture, but it can travel throughout the body causing infection once it has penetrated deeply enough.

Cheat grass is not the only nuisance-causing plant in Idaho, but it the one that veterinarians and dog owners find the most troublesome. Prevention can be challenging, but there are things you can do to reduce the risk or severity of its effects:

- 1) Keep dogs out of cheat infested areas
- 2) Keep long fur trimmed and well groomed – trimming the fur between the toes can be especially helpful
- 3) Check paws, ears and fur for cheat awns after every exposure. This will help eliminate them before they have a chance to penetrate the skin
- 4) Safely tucking cotton balls into the outer ear canals just before exercising in a cheat infested area, remove as soon they are done.

If you find that your dog is licking at a swelling, shaking or scratching their ears, or squinting and rubbing at their eye(s) after exposure please call for an appointment right away.