

FEAR OF FIREWORKS

THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN ANIMAL WELFARE CHARITY

Fireworks are used in celebrations across the world, throughout the year to mark different events, e.g. Bonfire Night and New Year as well as at private events such as weddings. Although they can give a lot of pleasure to some people, they can cause fear and even significant injury, both directly and indirectly, to both humans and animals. It is not uncommon for people and other animals to be hit by fireworks, but also for animals to run into the road in terror and get run over, for example. Our stray kennels are always busier when fireworks have been let off, as terrified animals run away looking for somewhere to hide.

The sudden loud noises produced by fireworks, which have a much greater sound intensity now than ever before, and especially as the noise is accompanied by a sudden flash of light, can be very distressing. Animals have very acute hearing, and loud noises can actually hurt their ears as well as terrify them. Some dogs try to scratch or bite their way out of the kennels during local fireworks displays, breaking toe nails and even teeth. When we are made aware of upcoming firework events, we leave music playing overnight, and spray PetRemedy spray in the kennels to try and produce a calming effect. Our dedicated staff sometimes stay in the kennels with the dogs overnight on bonfire night to make sure they can hear any dogs in distress and go in to comfort them.

Once a dog has developed a fear of fireworks, it may progress to include any sudden loud noise, such as thunder or even a car door banging shut.

There are a few simple rules that can help your pet cope when fireworks are being let off:

- Make sure you walk your dog earlier in the day, before the fireworks start
- Always keep your pets indoors when fireworks are being let off
- You may need to block off cat flaps to stop you cats from running off
- Draw the curtains so your pets can't see the sudden flashes of light, and switch on the TV or radio to disguise the noise when the fireworks start going off, although make sure there are no programmes showing fireworks displays scheduled!
- Make sure your pet is wearing a collar and identity tag with up to date details, so they can be swiftly returned if they manage to escape. Dogs and cats should now be microchipped by law
- Try not to leave your pet alone when a fireworks display is planned, or when you know fireworks are likely to be set off

- Provide your pet with a safe place where they can hide if they feel anxious. This can be in a cupboard, behind the settee or even under the bed. Cats often like to hide on top of the wardrobe so provide a blanket that they can burrow under. Put treats, favourite toys or an old item of clothing in the den, to help your pet feel more secure
- Try to remain calm yourself or your stress will transmit to your pet. Signs of stress can vary from barking, whining and pacing, to panting and lip licking. Talk quietly, praise them when they relax. If they want to run off and hide, do not try and stop them
- Do not allow your dog outside when fireworks are going off, even into the garden, and do not walk them. Don't leave them in the car, or tied up outside a shop
- Never take your dog to a firework display!

The Stray Aid Team