

KEEPING YOUR PETS SAFE DURING FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATIONS

by "K. Fornes" puplove@sprintmail.com Reprinted with permission

Provided by Best Paw Forward Inc., 1835 Oak Haven Plantation Rd., Osteen FL 32764-8872

www.bestpaw.com bestpaw@bestpaw.com 407-321-1006

Gentle, Effective Training Based on Trust and Respect

The days following the 4th of July are among the busiest for shelters across the United States.

Why? Many dogs are left unattended while their humans "celebrate." Frightened by the pyrotechnics, dogs jump or dig under fences, try to gnaw their way out of crates, cross invisible fence barriers, etc., and are often found miles from home. If you are going out on the 4th, please be sure your dogs are safely at home, inside, and secure. Leave music or TV on for distraction. Better yet, take pooch with you or celebrate at home and let your dog's dog friends come too. Just keep them clear (of course) of any fireworks area. Remember that dogs' sensitivity to storms, guns, or fireworks changes as they get older, so be sure you know how your dog reacts. And regardless, all dogs should be safe inside during such festivities. Lots of people do lots of stupid things when you put fireworks in their hands.

Dr. William Fortney, professor of veterinary medicine at Kansas State University, offers these tips for keeping your pet safe through the Fourth of July holiday.

Keep your pets away from all fireworks. If you take your dog for a walk be prepared for surprises and keep your pets on leashes.

Keep your pets indoors or otherwise secured when fireworks are being shot off.

If you think your pets might need tranquilizers take them to their veterinarian now. Don't wait until just before the holiday or you may not get an appointment.

Some pets won't go outside when fireworks are going off. If your pet goes outside to relieve itself, take it out before it gets dark.

During the Fourth of July holiday, some people see a side of their dog they've never seen before. Just as the snap, crackle and pop of fireworks can be heard, Fido or Lady can go from beloved family pet to Tasmanian devil dog. All it takes is the unexpected bang of a firecracker.

"We're talking about two types of fear. There are those animals (that) are just afraid and may come to you and shake or sit at your feet and whine. Or there are those dogs with extreme fear, or phobias," said Fortney. "These dogs can exhibit some bizarre, very drastic behaviors associated with that high level of anxiety and fear."

Fortney said he's heard of dogs crashing through windows and screen doors, jumping off porches or taking off hysterically and running away.

If your dog reacts either way to fireworks, there are several steps to take toward solving the problem. But first be sure you don't reinforce their fearful behavior, Fortney said.

"If your dog is afraid and comes to you and you give it a lot of nurturing, you are reinforcing that behavior," Fortney said. "If they come to you and you let them get on your lap or sleep with you or get on the couch, which is the natural thing for people to do, then you end up encouraging the fearful behavior. You need to distract them, not coddle them due to their fears."

If your dog gets frightened, you should take it for a walk or play fetch or any other type of activity your dog enjoys.

Some dogs benefit from conditioning training, said Fortney.

"During conditioning you want to take your dog to the point where they get anxious and start doing weird things," Fortney said. 'But only take them to that level, not over it. As you repeatedly stimulate them, at the same time give them positive reinforcements like praise."

For dogs frightened of fireworks, owners can have someone with a cap gun firing it in another room. As the gun is fired, praise your dog. This will desensitize it to that particular loud noise. You should start this about 30 days in advance and repeat it for 10 minutes about four times a day.

"Now what you don't want is the dog seeing the owner with the cap gun. Then it develops a fear of the gun," he said.

Some animals need to be tranquilized to get through the holiday, Fortney said.

"I think if your dog is afraid of fireworks you need to discuss it with your veterinarian and decide where you want to go," Fortney said. "The veterinarian can give you some good advice."

Additional tips for Independence Day and storm-phobic dogs, from Best Paw Forward Inc.:

Natural herbal and/or homeopathic remedies may help with some dogs. We carry Distress Remedy at the training center. There are others such as Be Calm, Calming Essence, Rescue Remedy, Anxieteze, Valerian Root and others. Start adding the recommended dose to the dog's food and water a few days before, during and after any stressful event such as a firework-filled evening.

For storm phobic dogs, we put some in the water every day during our long rainy season, or if at home when the storm clouds gather we will follow the directions on the bottle about an extra dose.

Some interesting results are showing up with the use of melatonin, which may be helpful for several stress-related issues. Used to treat depression and self injury in children, all that we know so far is that it affects neurotransmitters, especially dopamine and serotonin, which influence behavior. A high dopamine level is connected to agitation and restlessness. Avoid using with other medications or if the dog has an autoimmune disease. See your vet for the recommended dosage.

Desensitize storm phobic dogs by flipping the main power switch in your home off then on again to simulate the effects of a power outage, and add a deionizer to your home, then train and treat your dog for his normal good manners when a storm is not really brewing. Body wraps are also now available on the Internet. They have helped some dogs cope with their fears. Body wraps should only be used when you are present and closely watching your dog.