

Keep Your Pet Safe on the Fourth of July
by
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We all remember as a child the excitement of the 4th of July fireworks. However, that excitement for a child (or an adult!) might translate into panic for a dog or cat who doesn't understand what's happening.

This 4th of July please consider things from your pet's perspective and help them have an enjoyable and safe holiday.

Fourth of July fireworks can frighten pets, and that fear can cause a dog or cat to panic and try to escape the confines of a yard or even the house. To help protect pets during the July 4 holiday, consider the following:

Keep your pet indoors on the Fourth of July in a quiet and isolated room with covered windows, to help your pet feel safe and secure. Turn on a fan, radio or TV to muffle the sound of fireworks. These devices provide familiar indoor sounds and may help soothe your pet if he must be alone on this noisy holiday.

Don't bring your pet to a fireworks display. Many dogs are afraid of fireworks and other loud noises and they won't appreciate the colors (dogs are virtually color blind).

If you go to see fireworks and leave your canine friend at home, make sure he or she is very secure. Dogs have been known to break through screens, fences, even glass windows when terrified and trying to escape the sound of fireworks. The days after the Fourth of July weekend are the busiest ones of the year for many animal shelters - many dogs get "lost" after running in fear from fireworks. Independence Day should be celebrated by all of us, but the whole idea of independence is a risky proposition when it applies to your dog running free across busy streets.

Plan now. Make sure your dog has an identification tag on and check to see that the tag is legible (sometimes the engraving gets worn off). Your dog should also be wearing a current rabies tag.

Additionally, I strongly encourage our clients to have their pet "microchipped". This is a small implanted chip, about the size of a grain of rice, that is injected under a pet's skin over the back of their neck or shoulders. This is invaluable in the event that they lose their collar and tags.

If you know from past experience that your pet will suffer from severe anxiety caused by the loud noise of fireworks, here are 3 things you can do:

First, you may consider talking with your veterinarian several days in advance about giving your pet a mild tranquilizer. If you are unsure of how your pet will respond to a tranquilizer, I often recommend that my clients give it a "trial run" a week ahead of time

when they will be with their pet for an afternoon or evening and they can see how their pet is affected.

Second, an herbal remedy referred to as "Rescue Remedy" may also help. This is available in many pharmacies. Generally a single drop of this will help calm a nervous dog, but because the flavor is disagreeable to some dogs, some veterinarians recommend diluting it slightly with water.

Third, you may wish to consider a product called "Comfort Zone with DAP", which releases a chemical which is supposed to be a dog comforting pheromone. It often helps to calm stressed or excited dogs down. A different but equivalent pheromone has been isolated and produced to help calm cats. See petcomfortzone.com for more information. For some "anxious dogs" it seems to really help take the edge off of their anxiety or intensity. Ideally this should be used for a week or so before fireworks are expected. In the TriValley Area this is available at Pet Care Depot in San Ramon.

If, despite all your efforts, your pet still behaves nervously by pacing, whining or crying, distract your pet by playing with him or doing something he enjoys. Don't stroke, pet or reassure him by saying, "don't worry. It's okay." This may actually reinforce your pet's anxious behavior.