

FIREWORKS AND ANIMAL WELFARE

One of the major problems surrounding the use of fireworks, particularly in this country, is their potential adverse effects on domestic and farm animals. There can be no doubt that significant contributors to the 'anti-fireworks lobby' are those who feel that animals should not have to tolerate fireworks.

The RSPCA, in particular, adopt the position that fireworks are generally too loud. In the summer of 2003, the Society even staged a 'low noise' fireworks display to promote their 'Quiet Please' campaign.

In response, the Fireworks Industry has to adopt a standpoint whereby the entertainment value of fireworks must be maintained. A fireworks display without some degree of noise is almost inconceivable. Other countries and cultures are totally 'at home' with noisy fireworks; Spain and Malta, in particular, consider loud noise effects to be an indispensable part of a fireworks show and there is simply no consideration of the feelings of pets!

In Britain, the industry prefers to take a more sympathetic view and works in partnership with The Blue Cross Animal Welfare Charity in promoting ways of making the lives of animals more comfortable during the fireworks season.

The following general advice is given in the Blue Cross Leaflet 'Fireworks and Pets'

Dogs and Cats

Always keep dogs and cats inside when fireworks are being let off

Always close all windows and doors, and block off catflaps to stop pets escaping and to keep noise to a minimum. Put on the TV to mask some of the noise from the fireworks.

Never take your dog to a fireworks display! Even if your dog does not bark or whimper, it does not mean that he's happy!

Never tie your dog up outside when fireworks are being let off, ie outside a shop while you pop inside, or leave them in the garden

Always make sure your pet is wearing ID – even in the house. Ideally, they should have a collar and tag and microchip.

Never walk your dog while fireworks are being let off.

Prepare a 'den' for your pet so that he can feel comfortable, perhaps under a bed with some of your old clothes. If your pet does panic and hide in a corner, leave him alone and do not try to coax him out. He is just trying to make himself feel safer.

Ignore your pet if he paces around and whines. Never shout at him. Stay calm and act normally. Praise your pet when he is calm. Try not to leave your pet alone.

Small Animals

Rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets and birds need to be treated with special care when fireworks are being let off. These animals are easily frightened, and can die of heart attacks as a result of loud noise. Good precautions are;

Hutches and enclosures should be brought into a cool, quiet room indoors, or into a garage or shed.

Give your pet extra bedding to burrow into so he feels safe.

If you cannot bring your pet's hutch inside, you should turn its enclosure around so that it faces a wall or fence instead of the open garden.

Cover any aviaries or hutches with thick blankets or a duvet to block out the sight of the fireworks and deaden the sound of the bangs, but make sure there is enough ventilation.

Horses and Ponies

Fireworks must not be set off near livestock or horses in fields. Anyone planning a fireworks display in a rural area should warn neighbouring farmers in advance.

Obviously try to ensure that fireworks are never set off near to a horse's field or stable. Organisers of fireworks displays should do their utmost to ensure that owners of horses and sensitive animals are informed.

Preferably, horses should be kept in their familiar environment and in his normal routine, which will give him a sense of security. If your horse is usually stabled, keep him stabled. If he is normally out in the field, keep him there so long as it is safe, secure, and not near the fireworks area.

It is a good idea to ensure that an experienced person stays with the horse to observe his behaviour and ensure that he remains safe. If you know that your horse reacts badly, speak to your vet and perhaps consider moving him for the night. It is also worth looking at the benefits of complementary therapies.

Take care not to get in the way if your horse does get distressed as you may get hurt.