

# **Pet Safety for the Fourth of July**

A black and white dog, possibly a Border Collie, is running towards the camera in a lush green field. The dog is holding a small American flag in its mouth by the pole. The background is a soft-focus view of trees with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is festive and patriotic.

LIVE WELL UTAH

FOURTH OF JULY  
PET SAFETY

*Worried about how your pets will react to the sight and sound of fireworks? Try these tips to keep them safe and calm.*

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No Fourth of July would be complete without a fireworks display. But pets often don't find the noise, blasts and flashing lights associated with fireworks fun or entertaining. With fireworks going off in Utah throughout the month of July, pets are bound to get stressed and anxious. Karl Hoopes and Allison Willoughby, faculty in the Utah State University School of Veterinary Medicine, shared tips to help owners keep their pets safe and make the summer more enjoyable for everyone.

Both Hoopes and Willoughby emphasized the importance of keeping pets in an area they are familiar with and where they can't hear the fireworks.

"If your dog is mildly nervous, just keeping them in a safe area is easiest and safest," Willoughby said. "Feeling 'safe' to your dog may be a cool basement or lower level family room with a fan blowing to dampen the noise."

Hoopes said the shelter needs to be indoors where sound can be better controlled and pets can't escape. Playing soft music or leaving the TV on can also keep them distracted and drown out the noise of the fireworks.

Special clothing, such as anxiety jackets or vests, can also be helpful in keeping animals calm. Willoughby said these jackets basically give the dog a hug by applying constant

pressure, which makes them feel safer.

While dogs are usually more comfortable when their owners are nearby, giving them too much reassurance can actually have the opposite effect and make them more nervous instead of calm.

“Dogs can feel more anxious if you are telling them over and over again they are going to be okay,” Willoughby said. “They can sense your own anxiety. Try to project confidence to your dog and give them the most attention when he is calm and confident.”

Prescription medications can also be useful when it comes to helping pets feel safe. If a dog has high anxiety levels, Hoopes advised owners to plan ahead and contact their veterinarian to get a safe sedative to keep them calm.

“Every year from the Fourth of July to the 24th, people get sedatives for their dogs because they know this time period is going to be hard on them,” Hoopes said. “All they do is give them the sedative pill and let them go to sleep.”

Herbal supplements can also be beneficial in treating milder cases of anxiety. Willoughby said these supplements are available over-the-counter from pet stores or veterinarians and are safe to give over long periods of time.

Willoughby warned that people should never give prescriptions designed for humans to their pets and recommended that pet

owners visit their veterinarians to find out what medication will work best for their pets.

“Don’t use human prescriptions on your animals. Some may be toxic and the dosages are different for your pets,” Willoughby said. “Your veterinarian will carefully calculate correct dosages based on your pet’s species and weight. Also, your veterinarian will know any preexisting conditions that might not allow your pet to take certain medications.”

Willoughby had some advice for cat owners as well.

“I recommend you keep your cat indoors. They are pretty good about finding a spot where they feel secure,” she said. “If they are hiding out a lot, just make sure they have access to their litter box, food and water and somewhere they can visit without feeling too vulnerable”

Even after taking all of these precautions, sometimes pets still escape. Before attending any activity or celebration, pet owners should make sure their animal’s microchip and license is up-to-date to avoid losing their furry friends.

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