



BRIEFING ON THE IMPACT OF FIREWORKS ON ANIMAL WELFARE

Summary

Unpredictable use of fireworks and poor enforcement of existing legislation is having a detrimental impact on animal welfare.

We would like the Government to conduct a review of existing fireworks legislation, accounting for their impact on animal welfare.

Current Fireworks Legislation

Use:

- Fireworks can be set off by any adult between 7.00am and 11.00pm every day of the year, except for:
 - Bonfire Night, when the cut off is extended until midnight
 - New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year, when the cut off is extended to 1am
- It is not a legal requirement to have any form of licence or training to let off consumer fireworks
- It is illegal to set off fireworks in the street or other public places

Sale:

- Fireworks can only be sold to persons aged 18 years or older
- Fireworks can be sold at any time of the year and can be bought online
- A retailer does not need a licence to sell fireworks at the following times:
 - Between 5th October-10th November
 - Between 26th December-31st December
 - The first day of Chinese New Year and the 3 days before it
 - The first day of Diwali and the 3 days before it

In June 2022, the Scottish Parliament passed the Fireworks and Pyrotechnics Articles (Scotland) Bill. Once the relevant provisions come into force, the Bill will introduce fireworks licensing in Scotland and specifies that fireworks can only be supplied to, and used by, members of the public only on certain dates (around celebration periods). It also grants local authorities the powers to set-up 'firework control zones' allowing the public use of fireworks to be restricted in certain areas.

The problem

Dogs:

Dogs feel safe when they can predict and control their environment. When unexplained noises happen unexpectedly, such as those caused by fireworks, this can be extremely stressful. Easy access to fireworks means dog owners are facing a constant waiting game.

Dogs Trust's survey on Fireworks from 2021 showed that out of over 18,000 dog owners, 2% owned a dog that was injured during fireworks, nearly 9% escaped due to firework disturbance and nearly 13% attempted to run away. The Kennel Club also found that the number of dogs reported as missing doubled in 2020 during the two-week period around Bonfire Night and Diwali compared to the following 2-week period.

The Kennel Club research shows that 80% of dog owners notice significant changes in their dog's behaviour during fireworks, with 31% reporting shivering and trembling, a quarter reported unusual excessive barking, hiding or clinginess. One in five owners noticed signs of stress, such as pacing, howling, crying, and excessive panting.

These behaviours can be extremely challenging for owners to address because they are unable to predict or remove triggers for their dog's fearful reaction as fireworks remain out of their control.

Cats:

Cats Protection's Cats and Their Stats (CATS) UK annual report 2023 states that 64% of those who have witnessed their cat experience fireworks say that they express at least one sign of stress.

Cats will associate sudden loud noises and flashes of light with danger and an imminent threat to their physical safety, so their natural response is to vacate the area quickly. However, as cats struggle to locate the source of noise, this often means that they will bolt in an unfavourable direction which may not provide protection. It's recommended to keep cats kept indoors with the TV or radio on and with the curtains drawn overnight at such times; however, they are still at risk of suffering from stress due to the sounds.

In busy cities, cats are in danger of running into traffic, or becoming lost in an unknown territory. Whilst the introduction of compulsory microchipping for pet cats in England (which will come into force from 10 June 2024) is welcomed, many cats are currently not microchipped, and this can make it very difficult for them to be returned to their original owners

Horses:

As a prey species, horses are naturally fearful of loud noises. The unexplained loud bangs and flashes of fireworks can raise stress levels and trigger a fear response.

Horses can be unpredictable when stressed and afraid. They may show a range of fearful behaviours such as sweating, snorting and not eating, and can exhibit 'flight' behaviours, for example galloping in panic or trying to escape their enclosure because they feel unsafe. This can be dangerous for the horse, its companions and any people that may be involved, particularly if a panicking horse becomes loose on a road.

The British Horse Society have been collecting and collating data on firework-related incidents involving horses since 2010. From November 2010 to 30 September 2023, there were 1,317 fireworks-related incidents – 45 fatalities, 292 horses injured and 78 people injured.

Action Needed

We are calling on the Government to conduct a review of existing fireworks legislation, accounting for their impact on animal welfare.

Advice on how owners can deal with noise fear in pets may be useful to your constituents and can be found at the following websites:

<https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/dog-advice/life-with-your-dog/seasonal/fireworks/>

<https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-advice/fireworks-and-pets>

<https://www.battersea.org.uk/pet-advice/dog-care-advice/dogs-and-fireworks>

<https://www.battersea.org.uk/pet-advice/cat-care-advice/cats-and-fireworks>

<https://www.cats.org.uk/fireworks-and-bonfire-night>

<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/our-resources/kennel-club-campaigns/fireworks/>

<https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/fireworks-and-animal-welfare/>

<https://www.bhs.org.uk/fireworks>

<https://www.redwings.org.uk>