

# The impact of fireworks on equine veterinary practices and their clients

Findings from a short survey: August 2025



Study carried out by Redwings Horse Sanctuary in partnership with XLVets



## Executive summary

In autumn 2024, XLVets and Redwings Horse Sanctuary worked together to find out more about how the effect of fireworks on horses impacts veterinary practices and their clients.

As flight animals with a strong fear response, horses are known to be vulnerable to distress when fireworks are let off close to them. This puts them at risk of illness, injury or even death. The British Horse Society recorded a total of 884 incidents involving horses and fireworks between March 2021 and March 2024, including 22 equine fatalities, 92 equine injuries and 28 human injuries<sup>1</sup>. However, this is understood to be a significant underreporting of the actual number of incidents that occur.

A 2018 survey carried out by the British Veterinary Association found that equine vets are almost three times more likely to treat animals for fireworks-related issues than other vets<sup>2</sup>.

While anecdotal evidence of the impact of fireworks on horses is compelling, and there is growing public concern over the distress displays can cause for both animals and some humans, there is a significant lack of data to inform discussion and debate on the topic.

The findings of this short questionnaire report insights from 15 independent veterinary practices offering equine services to their client base.

Logging fireworks-related tasks for two weeks between 30<sup>th</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> November, 80% of practices provided one or more service for clients in relation to the impact of fireworks on their equines. Offering advice to clients around managing the risk of fireworks was the most common service provided. Five practices were asked to prescribe and/or administer sedation to animals and more than half of practices treated animals for conditions known or believed to have been caused by fireworks being let off nearby.

Almost half of practices said the impact of fireworks they experienced during these two weeks was what they had expected. Just over half reported it was less than expected. Over half of respondents always prepare for an increased workload around Bonfire Night.

Almost three-quarters of respondents expressed concern around the impact of fireworks on animals and their owners, and a third report that fireworks-related calls have become more common in recent years.

All participating veterinary practices said that, overall, they feel their clients already take adequate steps to try and protect their animals from the effects of fireworks.

While reflecting the experiences of a relatively small number of UK veterinary practices, the survey provides valuable insights into the issues fireworks present to horses, owners and the veterinary practices that are working to uphold equine health and wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bhs.org.uk/go-riding-and-learn/record-an-incident/incident-report-form/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/news-article/fireworks-season-sparks-vet-calls-for-pet-safety/>

## Introduction

Established in 1984, **Redwings Horse Sanctuary** is one of the largest equine welfare charities in the UK. It operates across the UK through 10 centres and cares for over 1,200 rescued sanctuary residents at any time, with more than 500 further Redwings equines having been placed in loan homes through the charity's Guardianship scheme.

Having had to put three of its own sanctuary residents to sleep (in 2014 and 2016) as a direct result of fireworks incidents, the organisation has worked to raise awareness of the impact of fireworks on horses for many years and launched its Keep Horses In Mind fireworks campaign in October 2024.

In April 2024, Redwings published a report following a roundtable discussion of experts brought together to look at the government's claims that the Animal Welfare Act provides protection for animals in cases where fireworks displays have inadvertently led to the injury or death of an animal. The group concluded unanimously that the Act cannot realistically be used in this way, and that more targeted legislation is needed to reduce the negative impact of fireworks on animals.

Redwings is also part of the Fireworks Working Group, a coalition of charities that work in partnership to raise political awareness of the many adverse impacts of fireworks on animals and humans, and call for tighter regulation of fireworks.

**XLVets** is a community of independently owned veterinary practices working collaboratively to share knowledge, experience and skills since 2005. Of their members, 35 XLVets practices offer equine services in the UK.

XLVets members are committed to building a positive relationship with clients and their horses and strive to provide affordable preventative healthcare as part of their service, along with educational information and campaigns to increase awareness of matters relating to common horse health issues and concerns.

## Survey overview

XLVets invited their members who offer equine services to complete a short questionnaire following the Bonfire Night season in 2024. There was a total of just six questions in order to keep participants' time to a minimum.

Questions predominantly collected quantitative data, though open text boxes were also offered for most questions. Seven open text comments were received.

Questionnaires were circulated by XLVets on Cognito software and the link distributed to their members on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024. Responses were returned to XLVets by the end November and transferred as a spreadsheet to Redwings for analysis on 4<sup>th</sup> December.

Fifteen completed questionnaires were received. Twelve responses were from equine practices and three from mixed practices. As the survey was anonymous no further details about the practice name, location or size were collected.

Data was analysed by Redwings Horse Sanctuary's campaigns team with the support of consultant researcher Dr Georgina Crossman and this report shares initial findings as part of Redwings' 'Keep Horses In Mind' campaign.

## Survey findings

Responses were analysed in December 2024, and a summary of findings for each question is presented below.

The survey was self-selecting, meaning there may well have been a bias towards practices affected or concerned by the impact of fireworks on their clients. However, the fact that several respondents reported they had not provided fireworks-related services this year, or that fireworks had no noticeable impact on their work suggests that a broad range of views and experiences were collected through the survey.

The relatively small number of practices participating in the research should be noted, however, there are only around 120 equine veterinary practices in the UK, meaning the sector itself is limited in size and this is a reasonable sample size as a result.

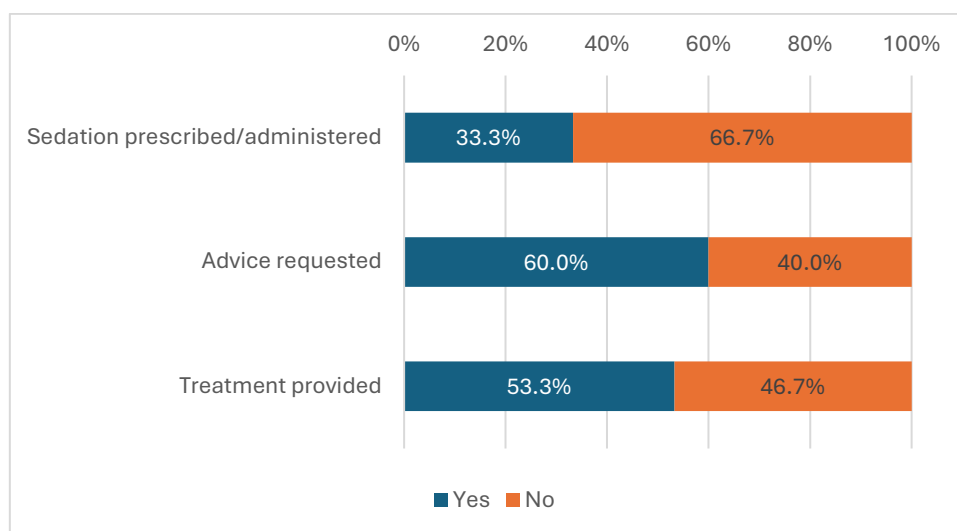
How many times did you carry out work relating to fireworks and horses between 30<sup>th</sup> October and 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024?

Respondents were asked to log the number of times they were asked by clients for advice relating to fireworks and horses, to prescribe and possibly administer sedation, and to treat animals for a condition known or suspected to be the result of fireworks being let off.

Three practices (20%) didn't undertake any fireworks-related work but 80% provided services in at least one category. Three practices (20%) carried out work in all three categories. Findings are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Practice type	Fireworks advice given	Sedation prescribed/given	Treatment following fireworks incident
Equine	4	4	3
Equine	0	0	0
Equine	10	0	0
Equine	0	4	0
Equine	0	3	1
Mixed	3	3	2
Equine	10	2	1
Mixed	1	0	0
Mixed	0	0	0
Equine	1	0	1
Equine	0	0	0
Equine	1	0	2
Equine	0	0	1
Equine	2	0	1
Equine	1	0	0
	Total: 33	Total: 16	Total: 12

*Table 1. Fireworks-related tasks carried out between 30 Oct and 12 Nov 2024*



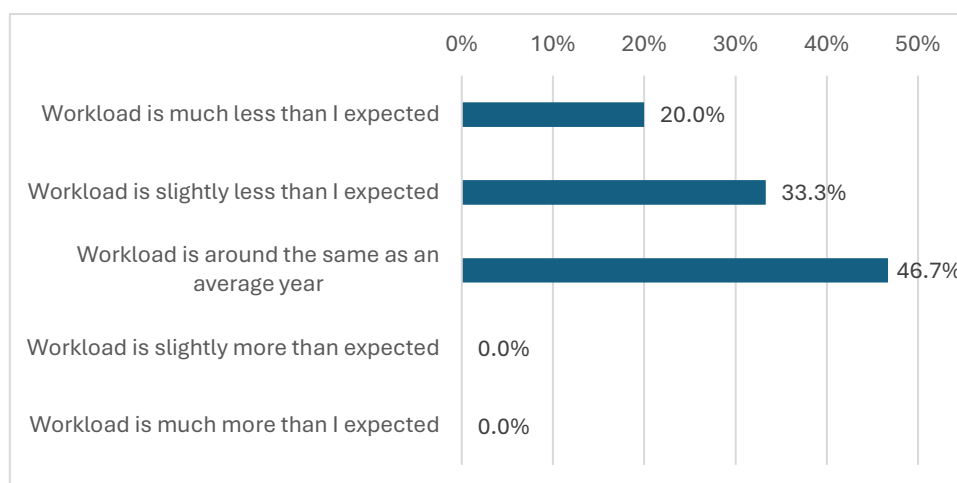
*Figure 1. Practices carrying out work relating to fireworks between 30 Oct and 12 Nov 2024*

It is worth noting that not all sedatives for horses require a prescription. Many owners will use over-the-counter products for their horses, which are likely to be milder in effect but cheaper and more convenient.

In the comments box provided for this question, one practice stated that they were aware of two instances of fatal injuries sustained by horses that were dealt with by a humane slaughterer rather than a vet so were not included in the data but demonstrate additional, tragic impact on the practice's clients. Another practice noted that they also provided a lot of advice online for clients in the period leading up to Bonfire Night.

### Was the quantity of fireworks-related work similar to that carried out in previous years?

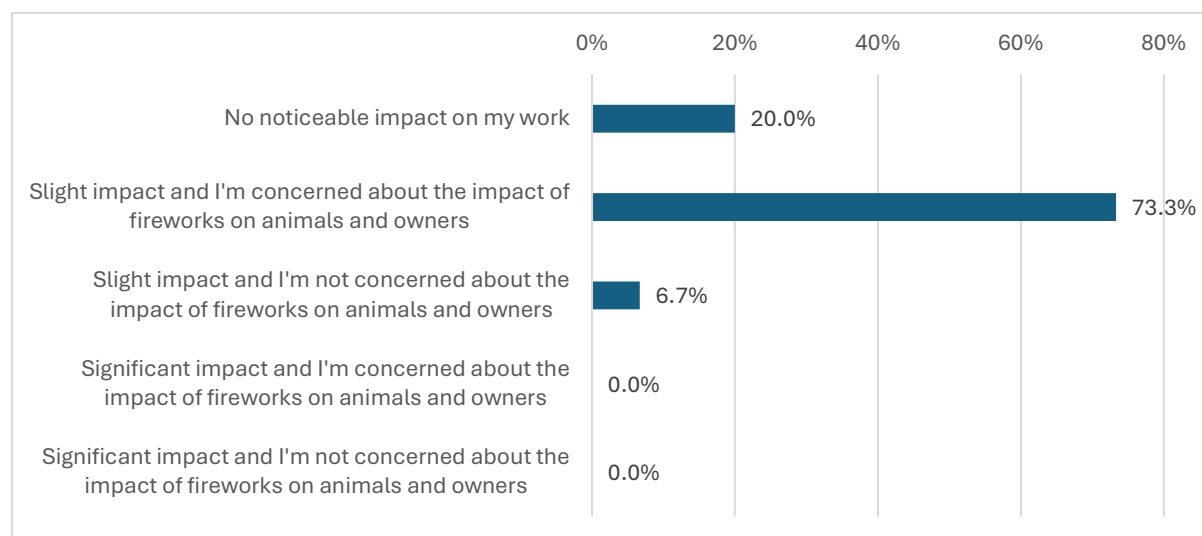
Almost half of respondents said their workload relating to the 2024 fireworks season was similar to what was expected. Just over half said their workload had been less than expected. Findings are shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. Workload in relation to expectations based on past experience*

### Which statement best describes the impact of fireworks on your work?

While no practices reported a significant impact on their workload, 80% of practices reported some impact and almost three-quarters were concerned about the impact of fireworks. Results are shown in Figure 3.

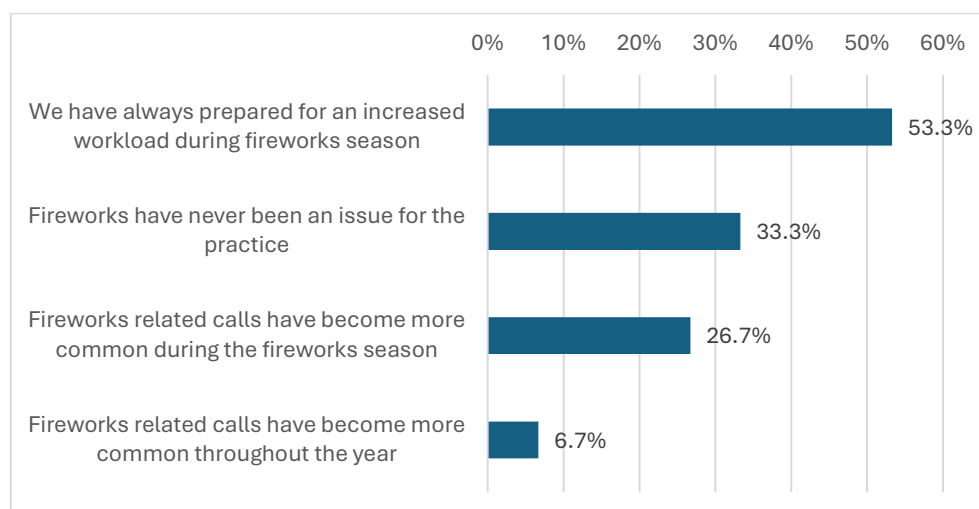


*Figure 3. Impact on workload and concern for animals and their owners*

### Have you noticed any changes in the quantity of fireworks-related calls in recent years?

Respondents could select more than one option for this question. A third of practices said that fireworks aren't an issue for them, however more than half routinely prepare for an increased workload around Bonfire Night.

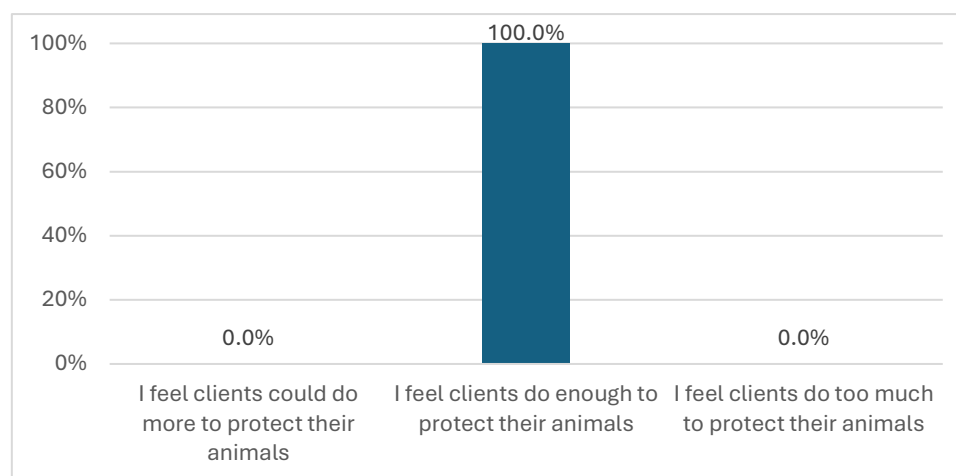
More than a quarter reported that fireworks calls have become more common during the fireworks season and one practice said that calls have become more common throughout the year. Findings are shown in Figure 4.



*Figure 4. Trends in relation to fireworks in recent years*

Overall, how would you describe your clients' management of the perceived dangers of fireworks for their animals during this period?

All respondents feel that their clients do enough to try and protect their animals from fireworks during the Bonfire Night season. Results are shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5. Assessment of clients' efforts to protect their animals from fireworks*

## Conclusions

Awareness of the risk fireworks present to horses and the anxiety caused to owners is increasing and this data provides a useful additional lens through which to assess the impact fireworks can have on the equestrian sector.

With 80% of survey respondents undertaking work related to fireworks over the two weeks around Bonfire Night in 2024 and more than 50% routinely preparing for an increased workload at this time of year, it is apparent that concerns and incidents relating to fireworks are not isolated anomalies, but a predictable and commonly experienced outcome of the way fireworks are currently used.

The work undertaken in relation to fireworks is only indicative of concerns and incidents which prompt clients to contact their vet. Many more incidents will not involve veterinary intervention and go unrecorded. Advice can be sought from other sources, some sedative products for horses can be bought without prescription and many minor injuries and illnesses may be treated without recourse to veterinary support. As the survey revealed, even cases where a horse has died as a result of a fireworks display don't always come to the attention of the owner's vet.

A third of respondents said fireworks-related calls are becoming more common, mostly around Bonfire Night, but one practice reported an increase in calls throughout the year.



This corresponds with the fact that use of fireworks is increasing, with the UK fireworks market projected to grow by almost 5% by 2032<sup>3</sup>.

Almost 75% of practices report that they are concerned about the impact of fireworks on their clients and equines, and there was unanimous feeling across respondent practices that horse owners are already doing what they can to protect their equines from the impact of fireworks. While horse owners would prefer to know when fireworks displays are planned close to where their horses are kept, there is also a limit to the steps that can be taken to prevent potential distress and the health risks associated with fear-induced behaviours. Focusing too much on the responsibility of owners to protect their animals needs to be treated with caution, as this data suggests targeting owners is not the solution to ongoing issues around the negative effects of fireworks on horses.

It is hoped that this report will help meet the need for much more data to help better understand the scale and nature of impact fireworks have on horses, their owners and the wider equestrian sector. Further research is encouraged and the objective, professional views and experiences of veterinary surgeons provide an invaluable contribution to the discussion.

## Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks go to XLVets and all their practices who participated in this study and to independent research consultant Dr Georgina Crossman for her support with data analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.expertmarketresearch.com/reports/united-kingdom-fireworks-market>