

**By Dr. Heather Vogl, DVM – The Zimmerman Veterinary Clinic-763-856-4848**

### ***Thunderstorm and Firework Anxiety in Dogs***

Summer is here! While most of us, both human and canine, are rejoicing, this is a time when some pets struggle greatly with behavioral issues. Celebratory fireworks and evening thunderstorms can wreak havoc on the nerves of a pet who suffers from noise phobias. Signs you may see at home include hiding, panting, pacing, drooling, and/or destructive behavior. With repeated exposure to the stimulus, many pets' signs become worse over time. So what can we, as their caregivers, do to help them?

Anxiety and noise phobia can be managed with a combination of environmental changes, training, and in cases where signs are more severe, oral medications.

The first step in these situations is always to strive for safety. Pets who panic and hide or run with loud noises should be kept indoors or in an enclosed area. Closing curtains and windows to reduce the noises and lights associated with the stimulus while providing distraction with a radio or TV as background noise also helps. The people in the home should remain calm and upbeat, providing comfort with petting or quietly sitting with the pet. They should avoid giving verbal reinforcement and praise of unwanted behaviors, namely pacing and attention seeking behavior. Giving treats and practicing learned tricks during this time can also help to distract an anxious pet.

There are several non-pharmaceutical options to help with anxiety. The Thundershirt is a stretchy body wrap designed to give constant, reassuring pressure and has been shown to reduce anxious behaviors in dogs. There are no side effects with this treatment and it can be a very useful tool. Pheromone products also can help as they naturally reduce anxiety. The Dog Appeasing Pheromone or Adaptil products come as a spray, diffuser, or in the form of a collar. An oral natural product is Rescue Remedy, available over the counter at some pet stores.

With most pets short term medications (given "as needed") can be extremely helpful in reducing anxiety and improving comfort during stressful times. In the cases of thunderstorm and fireworks phobias, oral medication is needed since the stimulus is sudden and pronounced (kaboom!). These medications are given 1-3 hours prior to the event. Some examples include the prescription medications alprazolam and trazodone, both of which are available through your veterinarian. Some pets have underlying anxiety that is best managed by daily therapy with additional special dosing during events like these. It is best to have an in depth discussion with your veterinarian about your pets anxiety triggers, the behaviors they are exhibiting, and the goals of therapy. With this information your veterinarian can help you modify the environment and choose the appropriate oral medication and dose for your pet.

Remember- safety first! If your pet is in danger of running away it is very important that he or she has proper identification tags and, ideally, a microchip implanted under the skin. This assures that even on a bad day, everyone comes home safe and sound.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.