



Draft motion for councils on fireworks

Fireworks are used by people throughout the year to mark different events. While they can bring much enjoyment to some people, they can cause significant problems and fear for other people and animals. They can be a source of fear and distress for many animals (including pet animals, farm livestock and wildlife). Animals affected not only suffer psychological distress but can also cause themselves injuries – sometimes very serious ones – as they attempt to run away or hide from the noise.

The unpredictable, loud and high intensity noises that many fireworks make can cause fear.

For example, studies have found fireworks to be the most common cause for fear responses in dogs¹, and it is estimated that 45 percent of dogs show signs of fear when they hear fireworks². A New Zealand survey recorded 79 percent of horses as either anxious or very anxious around fireworks or over the Guy Fawkes Day period³.

Debris produced by fireworks, if found on the ground, can also pose a hazard to animals, such as horses and farm livestock.

Although there is limited direct evidence, it is also likely that fireworks and their debris will cause disturbance to wildlife, and are likely to cause suffering or distress, depending on the distance from the explosive and the noise level.

The short-lived nature of firework noise can make it difficult for the police or local authority officers to pinpoint locations and take action.

The RSPCA believes that a licensing system would help with better enforcement of the law by allowing enforcement bodies to know where licensed events are being held so they can focus on locations and incidents elsewhere.

The RSPCA believes there is a real need to raise awareness amongst owners of animals about fireworks phobia.

This phobia can be treated (in dogs at least) in the long term but owners need to prepare themselves and their pets sooner, rather than just before the fireworks are let off. There is a need to raise awareness about the impact of fireworks on animals to the wider public to encourage them to be more considerate of those with pets, horses and livestock as well as local wildlife.

¹ Blackwell, E., Bradshaw, J., & Casey, R. (2013). Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 145, 15-25.

² Blackwell, E., Casey, R., & Bradshaw, J. (2005). Firework Fears and Phobias in the Domestic Dog. Scientific Report for the RSPCA, University of Bristol, UK

³ Gronqvist, G, Rogers, C. & Gee, E. (2016). The Management of Horses during Fireworks in New Zealand. *Animals* 6(20).

The RSPCA believes the law is failing as it does not prevent or sufficiently reduce the risk of fireworks causing distress, injury or anxiety to people, as well as death, injury or distress to animals.

We believe that further research is needed to properly understand the impact of noise on animals and a number of things can be done to improve the situation for animals and people by:

- introducing a limit on the public use of fireworks on or close to specific dates and times
- tightening restrictions on the sale of fireworks in the run up to Bonfire night
- reducing the maximum noise level of fireworks sold to the public, ensuring they are labelled accurately
- licensing all public firework displays – and ensuring displays are better advertised to the public.

Suggested motion for local authorities to adopt:

This Council resolves:

- to require all public firework displays within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people
- to actively promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people – including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks
- to encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display.