



88 Beech Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452
(802) 878-6888 voice
www.vtvets.org

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Linda Waite-Simpson, Associate Director
802-878-6888 info@vtvets.org

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Fireworks, Barbecues, and Heat can be a Dangerous Trio for Pets

By M. Kathleen Shaw DVM, Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

As the state begins to ease COVID restrictions, friends and family will begin to gather again and with the Fourth of July rapidly approaching, barbecues and fireworks may be on the agenda. While most people love the festivities, fireworks, barbecues, and heat of day can all pose issues for dogs, cats, horses, and even livestock -who can react to fireworks in ways that could potentially cause injury and even death. Some simple precautions at these gatherings can help keep your animals safe.

Whether you're attending a barbecue where there will be fireworks or even at home, don't leave your pets alone outdoors, even if tethered or in a fenced in yard. It's not uncommon for dogs to escape or injure themselves in a frenzied attempt to escape. In fact, many animal shelters report increases of stray intakes after the Fourth of July holiday due to the number of pets running away to avoid noise and excitement.

If you are planning on attending a fireworks celebration, keep pets at home. A good idea is to keep dogs and cats indoors, in an interior room without windows. Turn on the TV or radio to provide distraction. Keep horses in their stalls if possible and consider talking with your veterinarian about prescribing mild sedatives during this time. Be sure that your pet has current ID tags and/or a microchip so that you and your pet can be easily reunited in case he/she runs off. Some pets may become fearfully aggressive due to the loud noises, so protect pets from kids who may not realize the

consequences of waving sparklers or setting off home fireworks. If your pet is fearful during fireworks, never punish this behavior but don't reinforce it, either, by trying to sooth the pet by saying things like "It's OK". Paying attention to your pet may positively reinforce the fearful behavior.

If hosting or attending a barbeque or picnic and dogs are present, everyone must keep an eye on them so they don't get into trouble. One serious concern at barbecues is the grill: dogs will often try to jump up and steal the food from the grill, leading to severe burns. They will also try to lick and eat the grease covered rocks under the grill, leading to stomach upset and possibly an intestinal blockage. People food can not only lead to stomach upset, but grapes, chocolate, onions, and garlic can be toxic to them. Placing notes on exit doors and gates can help both you and your guests remain vigilant.

Finally, since it is summer, it may get too warm or humid for pets at a party. They should be kept inside when it's extremely hot out and they should always have access to shade and water when outdoors. It's easy to get caught up in the festivities and you may not see the signs of heat stroke, which can be life threatening. If you have concerns about your animals during July Fourth celebrations, talk with your veterinarian about the best ways to keep your pets safe.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 375 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.