

BEN THE BORDER COLLIE

Ben the Border Collie was a very happy and well-adjusted dog who lived with his family in Fife. Ben's problems started during the fireworks season. They terrified him and he caused a great deal of damage both to himself, and to his home whenever they went off. His family were very worried about him and they routinely took him to the vet for sedation. As Ben grew older, his fear and stress levels grew. One year, the fireworks season started particularly early. After six weeks of trips back and forth to the vet for sedation, the quality of Ben's life had deteriorated so badly that his family were forced to put their much-loved pet to sleep in order to end his suffering, at only six years of age.



The Scottish SPCA has long campaigned for improved legislation on the use and sale of fireworks. Following the launch of its "Dump Squibs" campaign in 2002, the Society has worked with local government, the Scottish Parliament and the UK Parliament to raise awareness of the problems posed to animals by fireworks. The campaign attracted cross-party support from MSPs and support at Westminster from Bill Tynan, then MP for Hamilton South, whose Private Members Bill gave rise to the Fireworks Act, implemented in Scotland in 2004.

Legislation under the Fireworks Act:

- curfew on the general use of fireworks from between 11pm and 7am; between 12 midnight and 7am on Guy Fawkes' Night and between 1am and 7am on other festive occasions
- upper limit to the noise level of fireworks of 120 decibels (dB)
- fixed penalty notices to under-18s using fireworks
- retailers wishing to sell fireworks outside of a specified period surrounding festivities such as Hogmanay must apply for a licence from their local authority

Although the Scottish SPCA has welcomed the legislation as a good first stage in fireworks control, it believes that some improvements are required. These include a further reduction on the noise limit of fireworks, and the proper advertising of upcoming fireworks displays.

If you find an injured animal contact the Scottish SPCA immediately on:
0870 73 77722 – Central Scotland
01224-581236 – North East Scotland
01463-231191 – North West Scotland

Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
 Braehead Mains, 603 Queensferry Road, Edinburgh EH4 6EA
 Tel: 0131 339 0222

Scotland's Animal Helpline: **0870 73 77722**

Web: www.scottishspca.org
 Email: enquiries@scottishspca.org

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 Scottish Charity No: SCO 06467



**FIREWORKS –
 FUN OR FATAL?**

SCOTTISH SPCA
 Living for the day when ANIMAL CRUELTY STOPS ■

Every year, many people look forward to the colourful spectacle of fireworks at festive occasions; Guy Fawkes Night, Hogmanay, Diwali – even weddings and birthdays. There are also many people across Scotland who dread these occasions because of the stress they can cause their pets and livestock.

Animals don't know that fireworks are meant to be fun. Animals cannot mentally prepare themselves for the rocket explosions. All they know is that terrifying, unfamiliar, unpredictable noises can invade their lives at any time of the day or night. Their fear manifests itself in different ways – cowering, clawing at walls, bolting wildly away. Many animals affected by fireworks suffer from heart problems and behavioural changes.

Many owners take their pets to the vet for medication to calm them down, but this is not a permanent solution. And it is not only domestic pets which are affected by fireworks. Livestock and wildlife are often also the silent victims of fireworks displays. Horses injure themselves in their stalls, and there have been reports of premature lambing, caused by distress at the noise. Nocturnal wildlife relies on night-time feedings for survival, and fireworks in remote countryside places will often disrupt these patterns.

The Scottish SPCA has encountered many animals dying needlessly and suffering unnecessarily through the misuse of fireworks. The Scottish SPCA offers advice both to pet owners and to those organising a fireworks display to ensure that fireworks displays do not have to be a time of suffering for animals.

ADVICE FOR PET OWNERS

- **Prepare in advance.** As the summer ends and the nights grow longer, pet owners should begin to ready themselves for the main fireworks season. Many vets now offer pheromone releasing plug-ins for cats and dogs. These plug-ins release odourless pheromones into the air which relax pets. It is important that the treatment starts at least ten days before the fireworks start.
- **Contain your pet.** There is less chance of an animal escaping in fright or causing themselves serious harm if they stay in one safe place. One family lost their kitten when it ran through an open door and was hit by a car.
- **Keep your dog on a lead.** Many dogs will bolt if they hear fireworks while out on a walk. One sad case that highlights this is a story of a Labrador who escaped his owner and ran into the sea in fear. His body washed up on a beach three weeks later.
- **Keep your pets indoors after dark.** Rabbits in hutches should be brought inside and dogs and cats should be in the house. Scottish SPCA Animal Welfare Centres always see an increase in the number of animals who come in the night after a display.
- **Close your curtains and turn up the TV or radio.** Pets won't be able to see displays out of the window, and the extra noise will help to muffle the sound of the fireworks.
- **Stay at home with your pets and act normally.** The natural reaction for a pet owner is to comfort a distressed animal, but this will only reinforce their fear. Acting as if nothing is wrong will help to reassure your pet. Licking your lips or yawning is actually doggy body language for 'I'm cool about this'!

ADVICE FOR PLANNING A DISPLAY

- **Choose your site with care.** Speak to the local community to ensure that the site is the best location for the display. Is the site near homes where pets will be distressed? Will livestock in nearby fields be affected? Is the site near an area that is rich in wildlife? All of these factors should be considered before a final decision is made.
- **Give your neighbours warning.** Always advise your neighbours at least a week in advance, especially if they have pets, horses or livestock. Make sure your neighbours know the date and time of any planned display. This will allow them to prepare in advance.
- **Keep noisy fireworks to a minimum.** Visual displays are less likely to frighten animals.
- **Be considerate.** Try and hold displays as close as possible to public festive holidays. This allows owners to make provisions for their pets during these times.
- **Know the law.** You must be over the age of 18 to use fireworks.

And for anyone who is planning to have a bonfire, please remember these tips to ensure that hedgehogs and other wildlife are not harmed.

- After building a bonfire, make sure to surround it with chicken wire, to prevent any hedgehogs seeking shelter within.
- Surround the pile with sand. Make sure to check the sand for pawprints before lighting the fire.
- Always double check before lighting the fire that it is completely clear of wildlife.