

BVA policy position on fireworks and animal welfare

BVA has concerns about the impact of the noise of fireworks on animal welfare. The noise from loud fireworks can cause distress for all kinds of animals (including companion animals, wildlife and farm animals).

Current controls on the use and sale of fireworks

The [Fireworks Regulations 2004](#) (made under the powers of the [Fireworks Act 2003](#)), [Explosives Act 2014](#), [Pyrotechnic Articles \(Safety\) Regulations 2015](#), [Environmental Protection Act 1990](#) and [Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003](#), go some way to reducing noise, nuisance and anti-social use of fireworks.

Under the legislation, fireworks are divided into the following categories:

- Category 1 (indoor use – eg party poppers).
- Category 2 (garden use).
- Category 3 (display use for open areas such as fields).
- Category 4 (professional display use for large open spaces).

In terms of noise control, the legislation provides for:

- A 120 decibel (A1) limit on category 3 fireworks (consumer display fireworks) which is in line with the harmonised European Standard - BS EN 14035.
- Powers for local authorities under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 regarding excessive noise - fireworks may be deemed a statutory nuisance by an Environmental Health Officer.
- A ban on the use of fireworks between 11pm and 7am (except on certain nights of the year – until midnight on 5 November and until 1am on New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year).

Other controls include a:

- Ban on selling fireworks to people under 18 years old (except for category 1 fireworks);
- Requirement for retailers to have a licence to sell fireworks all year round. However, fireworks can be sold by unlicensed traders for Chinese New Year and the preceding three days, Diwali and the preceding three days, Bonfire Night celebrations (15 October to 10 November), and for New Year celebrations (26 to 31 December);
- Compulsory training course for people organising public fireworks displays; and
- Ban on setting off or throwing fireworks (including sparklers) in the street or other public places.

Research on fireworks and animal welfare

A limited number of studies and reports looking at issues around the impact of the noise of fireworks on animals have been published. These include:

- [Research from the Small Animal Veterinary Surveillance Network \(SAVSNET\)](#) on veterinary consultations about firework related phobia

- [Firework fears and phobias in the domestic dog](#) Emily Blackwell BSc Rachel Casey MRCVS John Bradshaw PhD University of Bristol 2005
- [RSPCA research on firework noise](#) 'Keep the Noise Down'
- RSPCA '[Quiet Please](#)' report on how loud fireworks can frighten animals

These reports conclude that firework noise can have a negative effect on animal health and welfare.

In addition to the available research, factors such as very high-pitched sounds from fireworks, may also impact on animal welfare.

What BVA is calling for

BVA considers that fireworks legislation should be revised to reduce the noise limit of fireworks for public use, for the sake of animal welfare.

Therefore, the government should consider:

- setting noise levels of fireworks (categories 2 and 3 – for public use) in line with the [RSPCA's recommended maximum level](#) of 97dBAI at 15 metres – equivalent to a door closing;
- permitting category 4 fireworks only to have a noise level of more than 97dBAI (and less than 120 decibels);
- changing the design of fireworks to reduce noise levels;
- reviewing the classification of fireworks under the British Standard. Louder category 3 fireworks should either be modified to reduce their noise or moved to category 4; and
- helping to ensure that information and advice on the prevention and management of noise phobia is available to pet owners via veterinary practices, animal charities and animal behaviour specialists.

Those organising firework displays should:

- provide sufficient advance notice of the display to allow the local community to put plans in place for their animals; and
- always consider the impact of the fireworks on wildlife in the area where the display is to be held.

Further information

- BSAVA [position statement on fireworks](#)
- [Sound Therapy](#) for pets, which helps get puppies used to loud noises such as fireworks. Available to download for free from Dogs Trust.
- The [RSPCA](#) and [PDSA](#) fireworks advice for pet owners about preventing, managing and treating firework anxiety and phobia
- Defra, Blue Cross and British Fireworks Association [advice](#)
- Health and Safety Executive's [information on fireworks](#)
- British Pyrotechnists Association [Code of Practice and guidance](#)
- British Horse Society's [advice on horses and fireworks](#)

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