

# BVA position on the use and sale of fireworks

## Executive summary

BVA supports further restrictions on the use and sale fireworks to safeguard animal health and welfare.

Under the UK Animal Welfare Acts<sup>1,2,3</sup> humans responsible for animals must ensure that the animals under their care are protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease. This includes protecting animals from pain, suffering or injury that may be caused by the use of fireworks.

Loud and high-pitched fireworks can have a negative impact on animal health and welfare by causing stress or fear responses across a range of species, including companion animals, wildlife, horses, livestock and zoo animals.<sup>4,5,6,7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17,18</sup> We therefore consider that current controls on the use and sale of fireworks, as well as controls to mitigate noise levels, do not go far enough to adequately safeguard the health and welfare of animals in the UK.

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1 Animal Welfare Act 2006 [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga\\_20060045\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf)

2 Animal Health and Welfare Act (Scotland) 2006 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/11/contents>

3 Welfare of Animals Act (Northern-Ireland) 2011

[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/pdfs/nia\\_20110016\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/pdfs/nia_20110016_en.pdf)

4 Broucek, Jan. (2014). Effect of Noise on Performance, Stress, and Behaviour of Animals Introduction. 47. 111-123.

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

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7 Gronqvist, G., Rogers, C., & Gee, E. (2016). The Management of Horses during Fireworks in New Zealand. Animals : an open access journal from MDPI, 6(3), 20. doi:10.3390/ani6030020

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<https://www.bhs.org.uk/~media/bhs/files/pdf-documents/safety-leaflets/horses-and-fireworks.ashx>

9 Dale, A.R.; Walker, J.K.; Farnworth, M.J.; Morrissey, S.V.; Waran, N.K. A survey of owners' perceptions of fear of fireworks in a sample of dogs and cats in New Zealand. N. Z. Vet. J. 2010, 58, 286–291. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00480169.2010.69403?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

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11 Grandin, T. 2010. Importance of reducing noise when handling livestock. Available at:

<http://www.grandin.com/behaviour/principles/noise.html>

12 Kelly C. Ballantyne, 2018. Separation, Confinement, or Noises: What Is Scaring That Dog?, Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, Volume 48, Issue 3, Pages 367-386,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cvsm.2017.12.005>.

13 Linn Mari Storengen, Frode Lingaas, 2015. Noise sensitivity in 17 dog breeds: Prevalence, breed risk and correlation with fear in other situations, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 171, Pages 152-160, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2015.08.020>.

14 Emily J. Blackwell, John W.S. Bradshaw, Rachel A. Casey, 2013. Fear responses to noises in domestic dogs: Prevalence, risk factors and co-occurrence with other fear related behaviour, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, Volume 145, Issues 1–2, 2013, Pages 15-25, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2012.12.004>.

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17 Weeks, CA., Brown, SN., Warriss, PD., Lane, S., Heasman, L., Benson, T.. (2009) Noise levels in lairages for cattle, sheep and pigs in abattoirs in England and Wales. Veterinary Record 165, 308-314.

With this in mind, our specific recommendations to improve protections for animal health and welfare are set out below:

**Recommendation 1:** The government should reduce the maximum permitted noise of fireworks intended for public sale to 97 decibels with a 15-metre safety distance.

**Recommendation 2:** Private firework displays should be limited to using fireworks with a maximum permitted noise level of 97-decibels with a 15-metre safety distance, in line with our recommendation to limit the noise levels of fireworks intended for public sale.

**Recommendation 3:** Fireworks should be clearly labelled to indicate their noise level to the consumer eg. 'low noise firework' or 'loud noise firework – risk to animal welfare'. This would enable consumers to exercise an informed choice as to the types of firework they are buying if they wish to minimise the potential negative noise impact of fireworks on animal health and welfare.

**Recommendation 4:** The government should restrict the private use of fireworks to agreed traditional dates and the weekend closest to which these dates fall eg. Bonfire Night (5 November), New Year, Chinese New Year, Diwali. This would bring controls on use in line with controls on sale, which requires retailers to have a licence to sell fireworks outside of these traditional dates.

**Recommendation 5:** The current permitted period for sales of fireworks without a license around 5 November (Bonfire Night) should be restricted, similar to those for other traditional dates set out in fireworks legislation.

**Recommendation 6:** All public displays and organised events using fireworks should be required to be licensed by the relevant authority.

**Recommendation 7:** Conditions of a public display or organised event license should stipulate that license holders are required to give advance notice of the display to all local residents with the option for local residents to appeal against the display or event.

**Recommendation 8:** Conditions of a public display or event license should stipulate that the license holder must pay due regard to how their firework display may impact on companion animals, wildlife, horses and livestock in the local area, as well as how they are going to dispose of debris and remnants of fireworks.

**Recommendation 9:** The government should improve public awareness of the potential negative impact of fireworks on animal health and welfare and how to mitigate these by disseminating messaging through its communications channels, particularly around the traditional dates when fireworks are used eg. Bonfire Night (5 November), New Year, Chinese New Year, Diwali.

**Recommendation 10:** Government guidance on the responsible use of fireworks should highlight the potential negative impact of fireworks on animal health and welfare, as well as the importance of safe disposal of the debris and remnants of fireworks, as a key area for event organisers to consider in their planning of displays eg. in the Department for Communities and Local Government document [Celebrating with bonfires and fireworks: a community guide to organising bonfires and fireworks](#)

**Recommendation 11:** Owners and animal keepers who are concerned about potential fear or stress responses in their animals to consult with their veterinary surgeon, if possible well in advance of firework displays.

**Recommendation 12:** Veterinary surgeons should advise evidence-based management and therapies for fear responses to fireworks to improve the welfare of the animals under their care.

**Recommendation 13:** Veterinary associations and animal welfare organisations should continue to issue timely advice to animal owners on how to prepare their pets for firework displays and prevent or manage possible distress.