

Helping your Greyhound Stay Calm during Fireworks & Thunderous Weather

From the perspective of many greyhounds (and other dogs), summer is the scariest part of the year. Is it summer heat, biting gnats or the specter of a family leaving on vacation that worries them? No, it's noisy fireworks displays and summer storms (with the accompanying thunder and lightning) that turn some normally placid greyhounds into desperately panicked pooches.

More dogs are reported missing during the summer than in any other season, due in large part to the terror induced even by storms of short duration. And the week following the Fourth of July is the busiest week of the year in animal shelters across the nation. All it takes is a shrieking rocket, a few peals of thunder or a crack or two of lightning and suddenly that fence that has always been tall enough is no more than a low hurdle for your running, frightened pet.

In General:

- Be sure your greyhound always wears a full set of identification tags: GPA's tag, pet's name/home phone tag, and your county/city licenses.
- Stay home with your pet – your reassuring presence might prevent panic. If you can't be there, leave your dog in an indoor area where he can neither escape nor be injured if he panics. If he feels secure in his crate, use it. Leave the light on in the room. Keep the radio on or music to mask the sound. Close up the house.
- Reassure your dog in a calm voice; avoid having other family members respond in an excited or frightened manner.
- Some dogs can be distracted from the noise by playing a game of indoor ball or tug-of-war with you – if your dog has trouble paying attention to you due to the outside noise, don't insist.
- Talk to your veterinarian about medication to help your greyhound get through the storm season and the Fourth of July.

Fourth of July:

- Don't take your dog to fireworks displays, even if you feel you will be a distance from the firing site or plan to stay in your car. From the dog's perspective, he might as well be sitting next to the firing range.

Thunderstorms:

- Check you gates and fences prior to letting your dog out. Blown down fences and gates are the primary way dogs are lost during these storms.
 - Remain calm yourself – your agitation will only increase your dog's level of fear. Giving your dog a slow comforting massage using long strokes might help you both get through it.
 - Desensitize your dog using a recording of a thunderstorm. Start by playing the recording frequently at very low volume (almost out of hearing for you) while you are home. Interact calmly with your dog every time you play the recording. Over time, raise the volume slowly to more realistic levels. Then play the recording when you are out of the house for short periods, eventually working up to longer absences. Eventually, the noise of a real storm should be just normal background noise for your pooch. (This works well for other scary sounds as well, i.e. trash trucks and crashing trash cans.)
 - Investigate the StormDefender Cape® (www.stormdefender.com). Many dog owners report remarkable success using this product to calm thunder-phobic dogs.
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NOTE: D.A.P. (dog appeasing pheromones) diffusers have been used with some success to calm anxious dogs whether the anxiety is situational, such as fireworks phobias, or general/non-specific. Many dogs are comforted by this pheromone, which is similar to that secreted by a nursing bitch to calm and comfort her puppies. Diffusers must be used over a period of time to be effective. One commonly available D.A.P. diffuser is marketed as Comfort Zone™ by Farnam Pet Products.