

Pet scares in summertime

Sweltering heat, booming thunder and fireworks that sound like gunshots ... summer can be a scary and uncomfortable time for pets. Here's how you can help them deal.

For our furry friends, a thunderstorm or an intense round of fireworks in the neighborhood can be a highly traumatic event. Dogs with storm phobias can exhibit a variety of behaviors, including:

- > **Hiding in small, enclosed spaces, under beds or furniture, in closets or bathrooms**
- > **Intense barking, shrieking, whining or howling**
- > **Pacing**
- > **Drooling**
- > **Trembling**
- > **Destructive behavior, like chewing or scratching door frames or window sills**
- > **Attempts to escape the house**
- > **Aggression**

When the fear hits

Fear of thunderstorms is made worse for some pets because their people mishandle the early signs of fear either by soothing the pets or punish-

ing them. Soothing a dog (*Poor baby! Don't be afraid. Come here and get a hug!*) is an action that actually rewards the behavior, while punishing a dog for its reaction makes a scary event even more frightening.

When puppies and young dogs show concern, don't soothe or punish them. Distract them. Give them something positive to do, such as starting a training session with lots of treats or playing a favorite game. In other words, ignore the storm, distract the dog and set the tone by acting unconcerned. It's of the most importance to be gentle, calm and patient with your dog. Dogs who



have a negative reaction to storms or fireworks aren't being disobedient—they are truly in a state of panic and are looking for help to deal with this traumatic event.

Keeping calm before the (next) storm

Once a dog has developed a full-blown phobia, however, fear of storms can be dangerous to all. Dogs have jumped through windows, bitten when handled or eaten through walls. If your dog is afraid of loud noises, talk to your veterinarian. He or she may make have specific recommendations or refer you to a veterinary behaviorist. A veterinary behaviorist will work with you on a treatment plan that may include counterconditioning, pheromones or products like anti-anxiety wraps and capes in an effort to help your dog relax during storms. If all else fails, your veterinarian can prescribe a sedative to use just on days when there are storms or fireworks.