FIREWORKS FEAR!

Fireworks season is almost upon us again. This can be a frightening time of year for our pets and preparing for this time appropriately can help soothe their fears. The stress and fear that animals feel is manifested in behaviours such as toileting inappropriately indoors, cowarding and hiding, being clingy, barking, shaking, pacing, panting, scratching and not eating. If not addressed properly, mild fears can progress to severe noise phobias with severe reactions, and this can of course be distressing for both owner and pet. Noise and firework fear are behavioural problems which require a multi-factorial approach to tackle.

Top tips for helping your pet cope at fireworks time:

- Provide a ‘safe’ area such as a den or covered area for your pet to seek safety. Some cats prefer to be high up.
- Keep cats inside after dusk to reduce their fear and protect them from active fireworks.
- Don’t walk dogs in the evening before and during fireworks season.
- Provide distractions such as new toys and chews or play a game.
- Create a ‘White Noise’ room - turn on TVs, fans and other quiet distracting sounds. Draw the curtains and chat as normal.
- Provide a ‘thundershirt’ - a coat made of t-shirt material which fits snugly around your dog’s body and often helps comfort them.
- Ignore fearful behaviours such as hiding, crying, shaking etc. otherwise you will provide positive reinforcement of their fear.
- Don’t punish your pet or shout at them, this will only increase their anxiety.
- Try and be as calm as possible.

Feliway and Adaptil (DAP) diffusers, sprays and collars:
These are synthetic types of calming pheromones for cats and dogs that help to calm, reassure and comfort animals during stressful events such as fireworks and thunderstorms. The diffusers should be plugged in a few days before and left on throughout the stressful season. Collars are also available for dogs.

Zylkene:
This is a natural protein product derived from milk that helps to calm cats and dogs, helping them cope with stressful situations. It is not a sedative and generally has no side effects. This should also be started a few days before the fireworks start and continued throughout the season.

All of the above products can also be used during other stressful situations such as kennelling, travel, moving house, new arrivals etc. and can be used alongside behavioural training.
Sedatives:

Very occasionally stronger sedative drugs may be required to relax your pet. The most common drugs used are diazepam and ACP. These drugs may have side effects so the decision to use these must be discussed fully with a vet and a full health check must be carried out before use.

Desensitisation:

The best approach is to tackle a noise phobia is through a gradual process of desensitisation outside of the fireworks season when these loud sounds are unlikely to happen. One approach is using a “Fireworks” CD along with an Adaptil/Feliway diffuser. The CD is started on very low volume and over a period of time the sound is gradually increased. This is scientifically proven to be an effective combination for treating fear of fireworks in dogs. Thunderstorm CDs can also be used.

Worth The Effort:
While the above tips may seem like a lot of work and, in some cases there may be an expense, it is important to remember that each time your pet makes it through the stressful event calmly, that helps for the next event. Noise phobias are more often managed instead of cured so speak County vets today for more information on how you can help your pet cope with the up and coming fireworks.