

## How to Help Keep Your Dog Safe on July Fourth

Veterans Moving Forward, Inc., is a 501c3 nonprofit whose HQ and Training Center is in Dulles, VA. Our not-for-profit provides trained service dogs to veterans dealing with physical and/or mental health challenges at no cost to the veteran or their family. This month we want to offer some suggestions on how to help to keep your dog safe on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

For Americans, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is a very special day where we honor and celebrate our nation's beginnings in 1776. Although a celebratory day for humans, the July 4th holiday brings multiple threats to our dogs' health and happiness. The American Veterinary Medical Association warns that fireworks, picnics, cookouts, and other Fourth of July traditions can be frightening and even dangerous for pets. Up to half of dogs react fearfully to fireworks, according to owner surveys.

There are some steps you can take before, during, and after the holiday to keep your best friend safe.

1. Prepare for the Festivities. Desensitize your dog to loud sounds. Use positive reinforcement to show that these loud noises are too scary. Play recordings of fireworks and thunder while you and your dog relax together. As the sounds play, toss your dog a treat.
2. Identify your dog's stress signals. Dogs that are fearful may whine, pant or drool, pace, tremble, attach themselves to you, or look for a place to hide. Acknowledge this and know when to comfort your dog.
3. Be sure your dog is easy to identify. Many dogs take flight when they're frightened. If your dog makes a run for it, are their tags and microchip information up to date? Do you have a current photo?
4. Get professional help. If your pet's anxiety is severe, make an appointment with your vet, so you can discuss a medication that could help soothe your dog, and/or solicit assistance from an animal behaviorist. This may help them calm down during these traumatic times.

When you celebrate, keep your dog inside in a safe space when fireworks go off. If you go outside, watch your dog for signs of stress and talk to them to reassure them. Some dogs feel safest in a crate with their blankets, toys, and treats. If your dog exhibits signs of severe stress, stay calm and use a soothing tone of voice as you pet him slowly and gently. If you go outside, be sure to keep your dog on a leash. Also, don't allow guests to feed your dog table scraps. Many foods for humans, including onions, garlic, chocolate, and alcoholic beverages are toxic for dogs.

For more information about VMF, to become a Volunteer, to apply for one of our great service dogs, or to make that tax-deductible donation, please visit the Veterans Moving Forward website: [www.vetsfwd.org](http://www.vetsfwd.org). For more great tips be sure to check out our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/vetereansmovingforward.com](http://www.facebook.com/vetereansmovingforward.com). Have a safe and wonderful 4th of July.