

## **Management of pets with noise phobias**

### **Protect from overwhelming exposures to fear-evoking noises or thunderstorms**

Find a room, area of the home, or confinement area where the stimuli can be minimized and the dog most easily distracted. Some pets will retreat to a closet or furnace room for avoidance. Where possible it might be best to accept and work with the area that the pet has chosen. Light-proof window shades may seal out visual stimuli and storm shutters may provide some degree of sound reduction

Nested cardboard boxes, or a blanket or sound-reducing crate cover (Thunder Hut), might be placed over the crate to mute the sound. Be certain to maintain sufficient air circulation

Distractions such as favored chews and food-filled toys, companionship, and the background sounds of a TV, radio, favored CD, fan, white noise or music with a distracting beat (e.g., drums, rap) may take the pet's focus away from the frightening stimuli

A leash and head halter can help to calm some dogs and aid the owners in achieving focused and settled outcomes

Commercially available products to reduce sound stimuli include Mutt Muffs and Thunderband

Commercially available products to reduce visual stimuli include Doggles and Calming caps

Gentle pressure around the body, although not scientifically validated for dogs, may help to calm. Pressure wraps include Anxiety wrap and Thundershirt, which in one preliminary laboratory study reduced fear in dogs that had previously been conditioned to a thunder recording.<sup>1</sup> The Storm defender cape is purported to reduce the electrical charge associated with thunderstorms. One study found no difference when compared to a placebo cape; however both groups reported improvement<sup>2</sup>

### **Do not punish**

### **Ignore fearful behavior if the dog can recover from the fearful event spontaneously**

Use favored rewards (treats, toys) to reinforce any decrease in anxiety and to help the dog to return to a positive emotional state more quickly

### **Assist the phobic dog**

If the dog's reaction is extreme or disproportional to the stimulus, then it will be necessary to try and help the dog settle. Try distracting the pet with a head halter, novel and favored chews, toys, treats, or games, or perhaps a storm party

### **Desensitize and countercondition**

Select a calm location with few distractions for training. Train the pet to settle and relax in the area for rewards and to enter the area voluntarily and on cue

Desensitize with a CD reproduction of the noise and countercondition with favored rewards reserved exclusively for associating with the noise recording

**Provide anxiolytic support**

Use a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor or clomipramine on an ongoing basis year-round or through the time of year when phobia-inducing noises might be expected

Consider adjunctive therapy on an as-needed basis prior to the storm with a benzodiazepine, clonidine, trazodone, or propranolol

Natural products such as Adaptil (formerly DAP), HarmonEase, L-theanine, alpha-casozepine, or aromatherapy may also prove beneficial

<sup>1</sup>Landsberg GM, Milgram NW (2011) Conducting laboratory trials for the assessment of anxiety in veterinary behavior. In: Proceedings of Canine Conference on Behavior, Cognition, and Aging in Companion Animals. Toronto.

<sup>2</sup>Cottam N, Dodman NH (2009) Comparison of the effectiveness of a purported anti-static cape (the Storm Defender) vs. a placebo cape in the treatment of canine thunderstorm phobia as assessed by owners' reports. *Appl Anim Behav Sci* 119:78–84.