

Press Release

8 October 2009

SPCA warns on dangers of fireworks ahead of Diwali

The SPCA is calling on Capetonians getting ready to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu festival of light (Saturday 17 October), against purchasing and releasing fireworks, which can be harmful to animals and people especially those that make a loud bang.

Whilst traditionally the festival sees the lighting of lamps to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people's homes, the event has also attracted the use of fireworks, which have become a big part of Diwali celebrations around the world.

The SPCA is opposed to the use of any fireworks which emit a loud noise. Injuries and trauma to animals occurs each year during fireworks season (Diwali; Guy Fawkes and New Year), despite the SPCA's efforts to educate the public on the dangers and legalities of using fireworks and lobbying government for a total ban on the use of fireworks. The Animals Protection Act clearly states that "it is illegal for any person to terrify any animal".

The Firearms and Explosives Ordinance Act also makes it illegal for any child under the age of 16 to use or buy fireworks and it is also illegal to use or sell fireworks without an official permit except at an officially designated site. Yet, despite this legislation, fireworks are still sold in many corner cafés to anyone with money to buy and let off at home where they pose a potential danger. The act also prescribes the maximum size that may be handled by members of public.

Harming an animal with fireworks will result in prosecution and concerned members of the public are to please report any acts of alleged cruelty to the SPCA 24 hr control centre - 700 4140 /59 or a/h to 083 326 1604. Members of the public can also contact the Metro police 24 hour call centre to lodge complaints regarding illegal firework activities on 021596 1999.

The SPCA advises residents living areas where fireworks may be released during this festival to adopt the following guidelines to protect their animals:-

- Ensure all animals have identification – sudden loud bangs can cause animals to run away and get lost. Remember their hearing is far more acute than ours – i.e. they can hear a grasshopper eating.
- If possible, stay at home with them if you suspect fireworks will be used nearby;
- If you can't be at home, keep your pets inside and preferably in a room that is safe and secure;
- Try and mask any noise by drawing the curtains and playing calming music at a reasonable volume;
- Put familiar and comforting things around them such as toys, baskets, etc;
- Give your pets a nutritious and balanced meal at night – this is likely to make them more sleepy;
- Give them something to chew on – a chewy bone or catnip toys for cats;
- If you suspect your pet will react badly to fireworks, then seek professional advice from your veterinarian who may prescribe a sedative to help them cope.

These days there are also a number of effective homeopathic remedies available that may be bought across the counter at vet shops.

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Notes to editor

According to the BBC's website, "Diwali is known as the 'festival of lights' because houses, shops, and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called *diyas*. These lamps, which are traditionally fueled by mustard oil, are placed in rows in windows, doors and outside buildings to decorate them."

"The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people's homes. They also celebrate one of the Diwali legends, which tells of the return of Rama and Sita to Rama's kingdom after fourteen years of exile. In India oil lamps are often floated across the river Ganges - it is regarded as a good omen if the lamp manages to get all the way across."

Fireworks are also a big part of the Diwali celebrations, although in recent years there has been a move against them because of noise and atmospheric pollution and the number of accidental deaths and injuries.

In Cape Town, the main event is being staged at Ratanga Junction on Saturday 10 October.