

ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE NEWS

October 2020

The Animal Health and Welfare Officers from Argyll and Bute Council work across the area inspecting farms and dealing with complaints and queries in relation to animal health and welfare.

Our service focuses on inspecting those farms which we have identified as high risk and as many medium risk farms as possible. This means that many livestock owners will not be visited by the Council's Animal Health Officers.

In the course of our routine work, we have identified a number of issues which may be common across the farming industry in Argyll and Bute. We want to make sure that the wider agricultural community is aware of the issues which we have identified. The information in this newsletter is provided so that you can take steps within your own business to address any issues which might have arisen.

We hope you find this information useful. If you require any further information you can visit www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/animal-health-and-welfare, email animalhealth@argyll-bute.gov.uk or telephone 01546 605519.

Dog walkers are being urged to keep their pets on a lead if they are near sheep.



Having respect for farming and crofting enterprises by acting responsibly with dogs is a must.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code is very clear when it comes to the responsibilities that dog owners have. All dog owners are being reminded that should their pets chase or worry sheep, this could result in prosecution and potentially the loss of their dog.

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FARM INSPECTION ISSUES

As part of our routine inspections of farms, we would expect to audit cattle passports and other such papers (e.g. for sheep, goats and pigs) for traceability purposes. It has become evident that these may not always be held at the premises. It is important for you to have access to these and you might want to consider your own arrangements in light of the following.

Movement of tups

Sales and purchases of tups are frequent however this class of purchase is often overlooked when recording the movement in the Flock Record. It is however a breach of the legislation. Forensic examination of the records is part of the review system in the case of an inspection by officers of the Scottish Government. Failure to record these movements could well carry possible cross-compliance penalties.

Record all sales and purchases in the Flock Record regardless of the number of animals involved.

FARM SAFETY – E. COLI O157

When humans come into contact with *E. coli* O157, bacteria found in the guts of animals, it produces toxins that can cause illness ranging from diarrhoea to kidney failure. In some cases the illness can be fatal.

An increase in the numbers of outbreaks of *E. coli* O157 in the last few years has prompted a review of guidance for visitor attractions where members of the public might come into contact with animals. New guidance is now available and has been endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

If you invite visitors such onto your farm, you must follow the Code of Practice - Preventing or controlling ill-health from animal contact at visitor attractions - which can be obtained online at www.face-online.org.uk/CodeofPractice.

Preventing or controlling ill-health from animal contact is just as important on farms which don't have visitors, especially those where children or the elderly are present as they are at greatest risk if they contract *E. coli*. To reduce the risks of illness from *E. coli* O157, and other bacteria, you must ensure that hands are washed thoroughly after contact with animals or animal faeces and before eating, drinking or smoking. Remember, if you let www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

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holiday cottages or have a B&B at your property these visitors are also at risk. We would recommend that the enclosed information note is displayed for visitors to read.

Ensure workers and visitors practice good personal hygiene at all times.

Steps to minimise seasonal fireworks trauma for pets



There is concerns in unregulated backyard fireworks this year as official displays are limited by Covid-19 restrictions.

We are urging pet owners and livestock keepers who are worried about their animals' welfare to take steps now to avoid possible injury and distress during traditional fireworks dates such as Bonfire Night, Halloween, Diwali and New Year's Eve. The advice comes as vets say they are especially concerned there may be an increase in unregulated backyard fireworks this year as official displays are limited by Covid-19 restrictions.

Many animals have more acute hearing than humans, so the loud bangs and whistles— which at 150 decibels can be as loud as the noise from a jet engine - can cause significant distress and fear and lead to the development of phobia responses.

Vets see first-hand the impact of firework-related distress in pets, livestock and horses at this time of the year. In a survey conducted by BVA in 2018, around one in 14 vets across the country reported seeing animals with firework-related injuries over the previous year, with equine vets significantly more likely to report such cases (19%). By far the most commonly reported cases were self-injuries caused by fireworks-related anxiety, such as fractures in horses that had bolted from their fields or tooth injuries to dogs from chewing furniture.

The negative impact isn't restricted to noise levels - the debris and remnants of fireworks and paper lanterns in fields and surrounding countryside can also pose a serious risk of injury to livestock, wildlife and zoo animals.

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BVA Senior Vice President Daniella Dos Santos said:

“The loud noises and bright flashes from fireworks can be extremely traumatic for animals, from dogs, cats and rabbits to livestock, horses, wildlife and zoo animals. While Covid-19 restrictions may lead to the cancellation of official displays, we are worried about a rise in the number of backyard celebrations.

“We’d encourage pet owners and livestock keepers to consult with their vet as far in advance as possible to discuss management and treatment options, which may include noise desensitisation techniques, applying pheromone products around the house, and preparing a ‘safe place’ for animals.

“With professional input and owner commitment and patience, a phobia of fireworks can be effectively treated with appropriate behaviour-modification techniques. In more severe cases, vets may also prescribe medications to help pets struggling with fireworks distress.

“Even if you don’t expect your pet to be anxious please consider staying close at hand on the noisiest evenings, providing background noise when fireworks are going off and, most importantly, staying calm yourself so your animal is reassured.”

Signs of fireworks-related distress

Signs of fireworks-related distress can vary from animal to animal. While some pets show obvious signs of fireworks-related anxiety, such as barking, panting, drooling and attempts to escape, there are also more subtle signs that owners should be aware of, including restlessness and toileting in the house. Cats often hide, while rabbits may keep very still and thump the ground with their back feet.

Cows or sheep who are startled by the loud noises from fireworks are at risk of injuring themselves on fencing, farm equipment or fixtures and fittings within their housing. Poultry are especially at risk of ‘smother’, where in a fear response birds huddle together, which can result in death for some. Horses and ponies are prey animals and exhibit ‘flight’ responses in response to any threat, which can result in running away or trying to escape their enclosures.

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Top tips to keep animals safe

- If your pet gets distressed by fireworks or other noises, contact your local vet to discuss treatment options. This may include drugs to help dogs with noise phobias or pheromone products to apply next to your pets' den and around the house to keep them calm.
- Create a well-padded den for your pet to access ahead of fireworks season so they have a safe place to hide when fireworks start.
- Ensure your pet is microchipped and your details are up to date on the database, in case it runs away from home.
- Move small pets such as rabbits and guinea pigs to a quiet place indoors.
- Close windows and curtains and provide background noise to help mask the fireworks.
- If your pet is distressed, remain calm yourself – trying to reassure your pet can inadvertently reinforce anxious behaviour. Restlessness or toileting in the house can be signs of stress, so don't punish them.
- Keep livestock housed at times when fireworks are likely to be set off locally and remove any firework debris from grazing pasture before letting them out.
- Horses may be better turned out in a field than stabled, as in a stable they may feel enclosed and unable to move. Owners should consult a qualified equine behaviourist if they have significant concerns about their horse's response to fireworks.
- If you're hosting a fireworks display, avoid setting them off near horses, livestock or companion animals. Dispose of any debris and remnants of fireworks responsibly.
- Before lighting a bonfire, remember to check for any wild animals that may be hiding in it.

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