MANAGING NOISE AND STORM PHOBIAS

When the problematic noise or storm is occurring, how you manage the situation can help your pet cope and hopefully minimize your pet's distress. Medication is a useful adjunct for very distressed pets but should only be used under veterinary supervision. Make sure to have prescribed medication on hand. Event medications work best if given at least 30 minutes prior to the stressful situation. Some severely affected animals may be prescribed daily medication during storm season or other noisy periods like the 4th of July holiday period.

Pitfalls to avoid:

■ Punishment must never be used since it will only increase rather than decrease your pet's distress.

■ Encouragement, praise, or fostering are not helpful either as the pet may interpret them as rewards for the behavior they are performing at the time.

■ Try to remain calm yourself. If you are calm, it will help your pet.

Useful interventions:

■ If possible, make sure your pet is not alone during the stressful event.

■ Create a safe and secure environment for your pet. This might be a darkened room where lightning flashes will not be noted or a windowless indoor room where sound is muted.

If your pet has self-selected a hiding place, do not try to forcibly remove them. This is not helpful and may result in an aggressive response.

■ Try playing music that is loud or has a strong beat or some type of white noise (such as an exhaust fan) to muffle the outside noises that cause the distress.

■ Playing with familiar toys, engaging in games, or practicing obedience may help to distract the pet.

■ Use of a head collar and leash may offer additional control and can be calming for some dogs.

■ If you have pretrained your pet to go and settle on a mat, bed, or other location, use this strategy to help calm the pet.

■ Finally, once the event has passed, be proactive and contact your veterinarian for information on how to start desensitization and counter-conditioning exercises to help your pet cope better with the next episode.