



# Helping Clients Prevent Summertime Problems

By Nancy Peterson

## The Dog Days of Summer

Ah, summertime - a busy time of the year for you and your clients. The perfect time for those invigorating outdoor activities: escaping from the yard, barking at the neighborhood kids, digging up the garden, and more. **If** these sound like some of your clients' dogs, you're probably not alone.

It's not uncommon for clients to ask questions about solving undesirable pet behaviors, or maybe you've even been the one to bring up the subject. Perhaps you've already helped a client work with his dog who urinated submissively or jumped uncontrollably on guests, including you, when they entered the house.

## Did you know...

- An estimated 8 to 10 million dogs and cats are given up to our nation's animal shelters each year?
- Most are relinquished when they are older than six months of age?
- The most common reason these animals lose their homes is a behavior problem their caregivers didn't know how to prevent or resolve?

Just as you educate your clients about the dangers of leaving dogs in vehicles during warm weather, the benefits of sunscreen for their dogs, the dangers of the swimming pool, and more, there may be behavior problems that run amuck when

dogs and their caregivers spend more time in the great outdoors. Are you, your clients, and their dogs tearing out hair because of inappropriate behaviors?

You and your clients are encouraged to read The Humane Society of the United States' Dog Behavior Tip Sheets at [www.hsus.org/lace/15772](http://www.hsus.org/lace/15772). If your client can't modify her dog's behavior, the dog could lose his home and you could lose your client. If you can't help your client resolve these common behavior problems, be sure you can provide a recommendation to an animal care professional who can and uses humane training techniques.

## **The Great Backyard**

Many well intentioned dog owners think summertime is the perfect time for their pets to spend more time outdoors, where they can exercise and soak up fresh air. Dogs rarely exercise on their own and in many parts of the country, summertime means hot weather "not fit for beast or man." Having a dog spend excessive time in the yard may lead to social isolation, boredom, and frustration which in turn may lead to fence running, barking, digging, escaping, and more.

As a pet sitter, you probably have nightmares about the escape from the yard of dogs for whom you are caring. Do you ask your clients to make sure their fence and gates are secure each time they leave town? If your client's dog is a known escape artist, you will have to take him in the yard on a leash to potty and of course, make sure his collar fits snugly so he can't wiggle out of it.

## **The Sounds of Summer**

Is your client's dog afraid of loud noises such as thunder and fireworks? It's important to know these details. Dogs with such fears may destroy things in the house or crash through windows in their attempt to deal with these noises. Hopefully, your client has worked with a veterinarian, trainer, or behavior specialist to reduce and deal with these fears. It's important for you to know the protocol to keep your client's pet as calm and safe as possible.

## **Other Summer Dangers**

Be extra cautious if you live in an area of the country where warm weather increases the chances of rattlesnake encounters, wild animals being drawn to residential areas seeking water, and the proliferation of foxtails.

Perhaps your client has asked you to keep up the dog's daily routine of a dip in the pool. Sure you've got lots of other pet sitting jobs scheduled, but don't leave a dog

unattended in a pool. Enjoy a few minutes to relax with your feet in the pool while you work off some of the dog's energy by throwing his ball. And don't forget the waterproof sunscreen for you and the dog!

Dogs may become bored during their owner's prolonged absence and exercise can help them deal with their boredom and pent up energy. Remember, dogs may become overheated quickly during hot weather, but don't count on them to tell you when they've had enough. Do dogs ever get tired of playing ball?

Be cautious about hot sidewalks and very hot asphalt when walking dogs. Watch out for bees and other stinging insects and pesticides and fertilizers on soccer fields and other lawn areas.

Be sure you have the name and phone number of your client's air conditioner maintenance company in case the system malfunctions. Always provide plenty of fresh water for dogs during the warm months and if your **CLIENT** approves, you may want to put some ice cubes in the water bowl too.

If you're lucky, you live in an area where fleas, ticks and heartworm are only seasonal problems, be sure you know each dog's regimen for parasite control, and if the dog is on medication that the client has provided adequate medication to last beyond their return date. It's not uncommon for returns to be delayed especially in these times of airline cutbacks.

## **Labor Day at Last**

I hope your summer is a successful and rewarding one for your pet sitting business. Before you know it, the days will get shorter, the kids will return to school, and it will be time to look forward to cooler weather. Take pleasure in the joys and challenges each season brings to your life and work.

*Nancy Peterson is an issues specialist with the Humane Society of the United States and coordinates The HSUS Pets for Life Training Centers where animal shelter professionals learn to improve or implement shelter programs. Nancy has been a registered veterinary technician since 1980 and was also puppy coordinator and instructor for Canine Companions for Independence.*