

Calming your Dog during a Thunder Storm

by: Gary W. Fleming

We had another huge thunder storm here in Tallahassee, Florida yesterday evening and to use a little southern terminology it was a “humdinger”. Many folks know that Florida is the lightning capital of the world with more annual lightning strikes than any other place on earth. There are lots of reasons for that but that can be a really dry topic and not the cusp of what I want to share with you here.

What I want to tell you is how I use lightning to my advantage when training dogs, especially puppies. I’ve lived in Florida all of my life and I can still remember my first dog running and hiding in fear every time a good thunder storm would start to come up. One day I even found the pup with its head stuck in an empty waste paper basket. I’m not sure if the pup was trying to muffle the sound of the thunder or just hide from it but he was obviously concerned.

The next dog I had simply paced back and forth nervously when she heard the dull rumbling of an eminent storm brewing up. She became more and more distraught as the wind picked up and even more so when the rain started. She was simply terrified of storms and had no idea what to do about it.

When I purchased my first Kurzhaar pup several years ago it seemed to awaken some hidden intelligence in me and indemnify me from all things Draughthaar. And due to that renaissance I became more aware of my surroundings and how to use them to my training advantage. As it were, one day while sitting with my new puppy, a thunder boomer started moving in. As the dull rumbling moved closer I thought about what I should do with the pup.

We obviously can’t run and hide every time a lightning storm comes up and I can’t be home to comfort the pup during thunder storms 24/7. After a minute of pontification (only a minute is required of Kurzhaar owners) I decided that the best approach is to be calm myself. Lightning and thunder aren’t my favorite things either but I forced myself to be calm or at least appear so to the dog.

My next decision turned out to be the smartest one. I got the bag of treats out and every time thunder erupted I praised the pup and gave it a treat. It seemed to work and before you know it the pup was more comfortable with the loud claps of thunder and I think I was a little more comfortable too!

Extrapolating a little one might infer that this sort of conditioning could help when it comes to preventing gun sensitivity though that may be a stretch. At any rate it’s a good idea to try this before your dog develops a fear of lightning and storms.

Living in Florida makes this kind of attempt at calming your dog during storms a necessity since the thunder storms are inevitable part of life and generally occur each afternoon in the rainy season. You simply can’t escape the crisp explosions of thunder even when you’re inside of your home.

Some dogs stay outside in the kennel so have no choice but to endure the deafening blasts during the every day thunder storms. If you can make it easier on your dog by calming them and making the storm events somewhat pleasurable to them when they are young it may save you both a lot of future anxiety.

(Foot Note)

A related idea you may wish to consider is grounding your kennel by driving a piece of rebar (metal rod) into the ground and attaching a piece of 4 gauge copper wire to it and your kennel with grounding clamps. I don't know if this would add any protection if your kennel was to receive a direct lightning strike but it doesn't hurt to do what you can.