

Firework Safety

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Leave Fireworks to the Professionals

The American traditions of parades, cookouts, and fireworks help us celebrate the summer season, especially our nation's birthday on the Fourth of July.

However, fireworks can turn a joyful celebration into a painful memory when children and adults are injured while using fireworks. Although legal consumer fireworks that comply with the CPSC regulations can be relatively safe, all fireworks are hazardous and can cause injury. Fireworks are classified as hazardous substances under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act. Some fireworks such as illegal firecracker type devices (M-80's, quarter sticks) and professional display fireworks should never be used or handled by consumers or children due to serious injuries and death that can and do occur from such use or handling.

The following are examples of injuries from legal and illegal fireworks:

A 33-year-old man was setting off mortar style fireworks out of a black plastic pipe while in his backyard. As he leaned over the one of the tubes and lit the fuse, the fireworks immediately went off striking him in the face. He was transported to a hospital where he was pronounced dead from head injuries.

A 6-inch fountain that shot colored fireballs injured a 4-year-old girl. When the fountain tipped over, the victim was struck in the chest by a fireball. She sustained 2nd and 3rd degree burns to her chest and neck. She was hospitalized for three weeks for burn treatment and skin grafts.

A 15-year-old male tied together the wires of 10 sparklers. The sparklers ignited quickly and burned down very fast, finally exploding in his hand. The victim sustained a five-inch long laceration to his hand and forearm exposing muscle. Also, debris from the explosion lodged in his hand and arm. The victim had plastic surgery and has recovered.

To help prevent incidents like these, the federal government, under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act, prohibits the sale of the most dangerous types of fireworks to consumers. These banned fireworks include large reloadable mortar shells, cherry bombs, aerial bombs, M-80 salutes and larger firecrackers containing more than two grains of powder. Also banned are mail-order kits designed to build these fireworks.

In a regulation that went into effect December 6, 1976, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission lowered the permissible charge in firecrackers to no more than 50 milligrams of powder. In addition, these amended regulations provide performance specifications for fireworks other than firecrackers intended for consumers use, including a requirement that fuses burn at least 3 seconds, but no longer than 9 seconds. All fireworks must carry a warning label describing necessary safety precautions and instructions for safe use.

The Commission has issued a performance requirement to reduce the risk of potentially dangerous tipover of large multiple tube mine and shell devices. Tip-over of these devices has resulted in two fatalities. The new requirement went into effect on March 26, 1997.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that in 2002 about 8,800 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with fireworks. Over half the injuries were burns and most of the injuries involved the hands, eyes, and head. About half of the victims were under 15 years of age.

Fireworks should be used only with extreme caution. Older children should be closely supervised, and younger children should not be allowed to play with fireworks.

Before using fireworks, make sure they are permitted in your state or local area. Many states and local governments prohibit or limit consumer fireworks, formerly known as class C fireworks, which are common fireworks and firecrackers sold for consumer use. Consumer fireworks include shells and mortars, multiple tube devices, Roman Candles, rockets, sparklers, firecrackers with no more than 50 milligrams of powder and novelty items such as snakes, airplanes, ground spinners, helicopters, fountains, and party poppers. In general consumer fireworks are: DOT Class C 1.4G UN0336.

The following is a summary of state regulations as of May 1, 2002.

I. STATES THAT ALLOW SOME OR ALL TYPES OF CONSUMER FIREWORKS (formerly known as class C fireworks), APPROVED BY ENFORCING AUTHORITY, OR AS SPECIFIED IN LAW (37 states including the District of Columbia):

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
California
Colorado
District of Columbia
Florida
Hawaii
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
New Hampshire
New Mexico
Nevada
North Carolina
North Dakota
Oklahoma
Oregon
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Virginia
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

(The above states enforce the federal regulations and applicable state restrictions).

III. STATES THAT ALLOW ONLY SPARKLERS AND/OR OTHER NOVELTIES (total of 7 states):

Connecticut
Illinois
Iowa
Maine
Ohio
Pennsylvania
Vermont

IV. STATES THAT BAN ALL CONSUMER FIREWORKS (including those which are allowed by CPSC regulations) - (total of 7 states):

Arizona
Delaware
Georgia
New Jersey
New York
Massachusetts
Rhode Island

To help consumers use fireworks more safely, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission offers these recommendations:

- Do not allow young children to play with fireworks under any circumstances. Sparklers, considered by many the ideal "safe" firework for the young, burn at very high temperatures and can easily ignite clothing. Children cannot understand the danger involved and cannot act appropriately in case of emergency.

- Older children should only be permitted to use fireworks under close adult supervision. Do not allow any running or horseplay..

- Light fireworks outdoors in a clear area away from houses, dry leaves or grass and flammable materials..

- Keep a bucket of water nearby for emergencies and for pouring on fireworks that don't go off..

- Do not try to relight or handle malfunctioning fireworks. Douse and soak them with water and throw them away..

- Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks..

- Never ignite fireworks in a container, especially a glass or metal container..

- Keep unused fireworks away from firing areas..

- Store fireworks in a dry, cool place. Check instructions for special storage directions..

- Observe local laws..

- Never have any portion of your body directly over a firework while lighting

- Don't experiment with homemade fireworks.

PARENTS SHOULD SUPERVISE THE ORDERING AND USE OF MAILORDER "MAKE YOUR OWN" FIREWORK KITS.

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