

LEGAL OR NOT, FIREWORKS ARE TOO RISKY FOR AMATEURS

Permanent scarring, loss of vision, dismemberment – these are too often the harsh realities of amateur fireworks use. To keep the public safe from fireworks-related injuries and deaths, the nonprofit NFPA urges everyone to treat fireworks, whether legal or illegal for consumers, as suitable only for use by trained professionals. According to NFPA, amateur fireworks use endangers not only the users, but also bystanders and surrounding property and structures. Pyrotechnic devices ranging from sparklers to aerial rockets cause thousands of fires and serious injuries each year.

"Safe and sane fireworks don't exist," says Dr. John Hall, NFPA's Division Manager of Fire Analysis and Research. "When things go wrong with fireworks, they go very wrong, very fast, far faster than any fire protection provisions can reliably respond."

In recent years, fireworks have been one of the leading causes of injuries serious enough to require hospital emergency room treatment. Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, or scars or even death or disfigurement that can last a lifetime. The thousands of serious injuries each year typically harm the eyes, head, or hands, and are mostly reported in states where fireworks are legal. Even sparklers, which are considered by many to be harmless, reach temperatures of more than 1,000° F.

"Fireworks are dangerous and unpredictable, especially in the hands of amateurs," says Judy Comoletti, NFPA's Division Manager of Public Education. "The few seconds of pleasure those fireworks may bring are not worth the risk of injury, permanent scarring, or even death."

Wooded areas, homes, and even automobiles have become engulfed in flames because of fireworks. Fireworks-related fires have typically caused at least \$20 million in property loss (not adjusted for inflation) each year in recent years. A substantial portion of the structure fire property loss due to fireworks typically involves bottle rockets or other fireworks rockets. These rockets can land on rooftops or wedge within certain structures and still retain enough heat to cause a fire.

"For most people, their family and their home represent the hard work of a lifetime and their hopes for the future," says Dr. Hall. "No one would risk losing what's most important to them if they understood the dangers of fireworks. There are safer alternatives to using fireworks on the Fourth of July."

Public fireworks displays are one of those alternatives. Conducted by trained professionals, these displays are the smartest and safest fireworks alternative for anyone because they are established under controlled settings and regulations. After these displays, or any other time, children should never pick up fireworks that may be left over. Fireworks that have been ignited and fail to immediately explode or discharge can cause injury because they may still be active. Children should always tell an adult if they find fireworks rather than picking up smoking or charred fireworks themselves, which is just too risky.

