

June 20, 2001

All Fireworks Are Dangerous

An 8-year old girl received second and third degree burns to her leg when a spark from a sparkler she was holding ignited her dress.

This excerpt, taken from an internet site about fireworks safety, illustrates that **all** types of fireworks can be dangerous. Since sparklers have been legal in Connecticut just last year (the law became effective 6/1/00), residents should be reminded that even legal fireworks can be hazardous. As we approach the July 4th holiday, adults and children need to be reminded about the dangers of fireworks.

Although the Federal Hazardous Substances Act prohibits the sale of the most dangerous types of fireworks to consumers, every year people around the country manage to obtain them, and every year, stories of injuries surface on July 5th. Severe burns, amputations, eye injuries, and even death frequently occur from fireworks accidents. According to the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC), approximately 8500 people were treated for fireworks injuries in 1999. While the majority of injuries resulted from the legal "family-type" fireworks, nearly 33% had been caused by illegal explosives or homemade fireworks. Nearly 45% of the victims were under the age of 15.

Data compiled by the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System suggests the number of people injured is even higher. Their findings indicate that 12,000 people are treated in emergency departments annually due to fireworks accidents, ranging in age from 4 to 63. Nearly 77% are males, with the largest proportion (45%) occurring among bystanders. Injuries involving the fireworks operators comprised the next largest group at 35%. The majority of injuries (67%) occurred at home.

Even though fireworks have been banned in Connecticut (except for public displays designed and operated by professionals) since the 1950's, a number of people continue to become injured each year. Now that sparklers are legal, it is logical to anticipate the number of injuries to small children will increase. For children under the age of 5, sparklers cause ¾ of the fireworks injuries. Neither the children nor adults realize that sparklers can burn as hot as 1800 °F. Parents can help to safeguard their children by teaching them not to use fireworks of any kind. If they find an unexploded firecracker on the ground, they must not touch it, but report it to an adult.

Despite the fact that fireworks are illegal in Connecticut, some people will persist in using them. Others will visit friends and relatives in states where personal use of fireworks is permitted, so for anyone who does handle fireworks, the following safety guidelines should be followed to reduce the risk of injury:

- Never allow children to light or play with any type of fireworks.
- Read and follow all warnings and instructions.

- Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks; never point fireworks at another person.
- Keep a bucket of water or a hose nearby in case of a malfunction.
- Always light fireworks **outdoors** on a smooth, flat surface, pointed away from buildings, dry leaves, and flammable materials.
- Only light one firework at a time.
- Never extend any part of the body over a lit firework.
- Never try to re-light a dud.
- Do not use fireworks in windy conditions.
- Never use drugs or alcohol when lighting fireworks.
- Do not use fireworks that are leaking powder, appear to be very old, or show any signs of mishandling.
- Dispose of fireworks by soaking them in water and then placing them in the trash.

In places where it is legal for consumers to use fireworks, the number and severity of injuries could be greatly reduced by following these safety practices. According to the CPSC, the majority of injuries associated with fireworks are the result of misuse rather than malfunction.

It is also worth noting that not only do fireworks cause death and injury to people, they are also responsible for millions of dollars of damage to property. Fireworks start thousands of fires each year.

To maximize both safety and enjoyment this Fourth of July, plan to attend one of the local fireworks displays offered by the surrounding communities. As the CPSC advises, "Leave Fireworks to the Professionals!"