

CONSUMER FIREWORKS: DANGEROUS AND ILLEGAL

Fireworks and the Fourth of July are two things that seem to go hand in hand. This Fourth of July, the New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control would like to remind all New Yorkers that the use and possession of all consumer fireworks is illegal in our state. A warning about the dangers of fireworks and the injuries they cause each year is, theoretically, unnecessary. However, we all know that many people across New York State will choose to overlook the law and use them illegally during various private celebrations. Due to this simple fact, OFPC believes it is essential to remind New Yorkers of the state law, and bring awareness to the many potential dangers of fireworks and the injuries they cause.

Fact: the safest way to prevent fireworks-related injuries is to leave fireworks displays to trained professionals. Annually, thousands of people are treated in emergency rooms for injuries sustained from the usage of fireworks, the highest rate of injury (usually half) being children under 15 years of age. The most common injuries that occur are to the hands and fingers, eyes, and the head and face. Over half the the injuries are burns.

Fireworks can cause blindness, third degree severe burns, permanent scarring, and may also cause life threatening residential and motor vehicle fires.

Between June 18 and July 18, 2005, Tthe majority of firework related injuries are caused by firecrackers (26%), followed by sparklers (17%), and bottle rockets (17%) (Greene & Joholske 2006). Sparklers were are associated with more than half of the estimated injuries for children under five. Parents, many of whom are aware of the dangers of firecrackers, bottle rockets, and roman candles, have an illusion that sparklers are safe for young children. Sparklers can reach temperatures of over 1000°F, and should never be handled by a child under the age of 12.

Between 2000-2005, more than one third of the fireworks-related deaths involved professional devices that were illegally sold to consumers (CPSC 2006a).



How and why do these injuries occur?

- **Availability:** In spite of federal regulations and varying state prohibitions, many types of fireworks are often accessible by the public. It is not uncommon to find fireworks distributors near state borders, where residents of states with strict fireworks regulations can take advantage of more lenient state laws.
- **Fireworks type:** Among the various types of fireworks, some of which are sold legally in some states, bottle rockets can fly into one's face and cause eye injuries; sparklers can ignite one's clothing (sparklers burn at more than 1000°F); and firecrackers can injure one's hands or face if they explode at close range.
- **Being too close:** Injuries may result from being too close to fireworks when they explode; for example, when someone bends over to look more closely at a firework that has been ignited, or when a misguided bottle rocket hits a nearby person.
- **Lack of physical coordination:** Younger children often lack the physical coordination to handle fireworks safely.
- **Curiosity:** Children are often excited and curious around fireworks, which can increase their chances of being injured (for example, when they re-examine a firecracker dud that initially fails to ignite).
- **Experimentation:** Homemade fireworks (for example, ones made of the powder from several firecrackers) can lead to dangerous explosions (CDC 2004).

Again, we remind New Yorkers that all fireworks are illegal to own or operate use or possess in this state without a permit. They can lead to serious injuries or death. We ask all New Yorkers to obey state law and leave fireworks displays to the trained professionals.



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