



4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 • Fax (334) 255-2266
<https://safety.army.mil>

Ooh! Ahh! Ow?

Common sense keeps fireworks risk at bay

By Mollie Miller

U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center

New Year's Eve 2001 is a night that retired Master Sgt. Tracey Russell will never forget.

Russell and several friends had gathered to ring in the New Year and decided to light a few fireworks to celebrate the occasion. When the box of fireworks was opened, they discovered one canister-type firework was broken but, rather than throw it away, a few of the party attendees decided to piece it back together and try to light it anyway.

After a little discussion and handy work, the broken firework was determined to be "fixed" and one of the party goers lit the patched up explosive. Almost immediately the firework detonated, sending sparks and debris in all directions.

"That certainly got all our hearts pumping," Russell said.

Russell and her friends were lucky that year; no one sustained any serious injuries from the "fixed" firework. Not everyone is so lucky.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that in 2008, the last year a fireworks-related injury report was generated, seven people died and an estimated 7,000 were treated in emergency departments for fireworks-related injuries in the United States. More than half of those injured were under the age of 20 and most of the injuries affected the hands, eyes, head, face and ears.

The Army is not immune to these statistics. Last year, a Soldier injured his hand after a firework he was holding exploded faster than he had anticipated and, just five years ago, a Soldier lost his eye after a firework ignited prematurely and hit him in the face.

"Due to their explosive and heat related nature, fireworks must be handled with extreme caution," Russell, now a safety specialist at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, said. "Those who choose to handle fireworks must always be mindful not only of themselves and how they are handling the fireworks but also where they are handling them, who else is around and what the weather conditions are."

A summer without fireworks is like a picnic without a hotdog – it just doesn't happen. A safe summer fireworks experience is possible, however, if people follow just a few easy guidelines.

Officials at the National Council on Fireworks Safety (NCFS) said fireworks safety simply comes down to one important tool – common sense. Understanding the importance of reading all fireworks labels and performance descriptions would be tremendously beneficial for all consumers.

“It is vital to know what to expect once you light a firework and these labels explain that important information,” Russell said.

Russell said the common sense approach to fireworks safety also includes understanding that alcohol and explosives don’t mix.

“When you are dealing with fireworks, something that burns very hot, you need to use extreme caution,” she said. “If you are impaired by alcohol, you may not be using the amount of caution you should and could end up hurting yourself or someone else.”

Russell said because all fireworks present some level of danger, the best thing to do to ensure a safe and fun fireworks experience is to simply watch a professional show.

“Go out, relax and let someone else do the dangerous work while you sit back and enjoy,” she said.

For more information about fireworks safety including firework recall listings, visit www.fireworksafety.com. For information about the Army’s Safe Summer Campaign, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

-30-

SIDEBAR/INFO BOX

Fireworks Safety

- Use fireworks outdoors only.
- Obey local laws. If fireworks are not legal where you live, do not use them.
- Always have a hose or bucket of water within reach.
- Only use fireworks as intended. Don't try to alter them or combine them.
- Never relight a "dud" firework. Wait 20 minutes and then soak it in a bucket of water.
- Spectators should keep a safe distance from the shooter and the shooter should wear safety glasses.
- Alcohol and fireworks do not mix. Have a "designated shooter."
- Only persons over the age of 12 should be allowed to handle sparklers of any type.
- Do not ever use homemade fireworks of illegal explosives

Source: www.fireworksafety.com



**ARMY SAFE
IS ARMY STRONG**

