



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?



4905, 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-2919 – Fax (334) 255-2609
<https://safety.army.mil>

Shooting Smart

Chris Frazier
Strategic Communication Directorate
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
Fort Rucker, Ala.

Let's face it --a Fourth of July celebration without bottle rockets, Roman candles and sparklers feels incomplete. For hundreds of Americans, though, this year's festivities will end badly because they failed to take the proper safety precautions when handling fireworks.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2008, seven people died and an estimated 7,000 were treated in emergency rooms due to fireworks-related injuries in the United States. More than two-thirds of those injuries occurred during the weeks surrounding the July Fourth holiday, with the hands/fingers, eyes and legs being the most commonly injured body parts.

Fortunately, fireworks-related injuries are avoidable if a few common-sense rules are followed, said Ralph Apel, spokesperson for the National Council on Fireworks Safety. Apel urges those who plan to celebrate with fireworks this Independence Day to heed the following recommendations from the NCFS and Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Only use fireworks outdoors.
- Read and follow all warnings and instructions before igniting the fireworks.
- Obey all local laws regarding the use of fireworks.
- Ensure spectators are out of the range of the fireworks.
- Only light fireworks outside on a smooth, flat surface away from the house and flammable materials. If drought conditions are present, avoid using fireworks altogether.
- Never try to relight fireworks that have not fully functioned.

- Always have a bucket of water or water hose nearby.
- Remember, alcoholic beverages and fireworks never mix.

Even fireworks many parents consider safe for younger children to handle, such as sparklers, can cause painful injuries. The CPSC reports that 16 percent of consumer fireworks injuries are caused by sparklers, with the majority of those occurring to young children.

“A lot of parents don’t seem to teach sparkler safety,” Apel said. “If parents would get involved in teaching their children about sparklers, such as only handling one sparkler at a time and standing a safe distance away from others, they can be safe.”

In an effort to reduce sparkler injuries, Apel recommends parents follow these simple safety tips:

- Sparklers should always be used under close adult supervision.
- Always remain standing while using sparklers.
- Never hold a child in your arms while using sparklers.
- Never hold, or light, more than one sparkler at a time.
- Sparklers and bare feet can be a painful combination. Always wear closed-toe shoes when using sparklers.
- Sparkler wire and stick remain hot long after the flame has gone out. Be sure to drop the spent sparklers in a bucket of water after 20 minutes.
- Never hand a lighted sparkler to another person. Give them the unlit sparkler and then light it.
- Always stand at least 6 feet from another person while using sparklers.
- Never throw sparklers.
- Show children how to hold sparklers away from their body and at arm’s length.
- Teach children not to wave sparklers, especially wooden stick sparklers, or run while holding sparklers.

“Like fireworks, alcoholic beverages are another party favorite at many July Fourth celebrations. However, the two should never mix,” said Tracey Russell, a safety specialist at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center.

“While a fireworks display can be a beautiful sight, improper handling of fireworks can result in disaster,” Russell said. “Alcohol impairs both judgment and reaction time, which increases the likelihood of an accident occurring. The safest choice is to watch a local fireworks

display put on by professionals. But if you plan to put on your own show, refrain from alcohol consumption prior to and during the show.”

Fireworks can add extra excitement to any July Fourth celebration. Be responsible this Independence Day and take all the precautions to protect yourself and your family from a needless accident.

FYI

Before lighting your first fuse, make sure fireworks are legal to possess and use in your city and state. The National Council on Fireworks Safety Website has a directory of state laws regarding fireworks, including what items are permitted and prohibited for use. It’s also a good idea to ask the local fire or police department if fireworks are legal in your area. Although fireworks may be legal in your state, there may be reasons — such as a burn ban due to dry weather — why their use is prohibited in some areas. For more information, visit the NCFS’s website at <http://fireworksafety.com>.



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