



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

www.adph.org

Follow safety guidelines if you handle fireworks

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Melissa Khan
(334) 206-5541
molmstead@adph.state.al.us

The American traditions of parades, cookouts and fireworks help us celebrate the summer season, especially our nation's birthday on Independence Day. However, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Alabama Department of Public Health remind the public that fireworks can turn a joyful celebration into a painful memory when injuries occur while using fireworks.

Although legal consumer fireworks that comply with the CPSC regulations can be relatively safe, all fireworks are hazardous and can cause injury. Fireworks are classified as hazardous substances under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act. Some fireworks such as illegal firecracker type devices (M-80's, quarter sticks) and professional display fireworks should never be used or handled by consumers or children due to the serious injuries and deaths that can and do occur from such use or handling.

The following are examples of injuries from legal and illegal fireworks which the CPSC cites this year:

A 33-year-old man was setting off mortar style fireworks out of a black plastic pipe while in his back yard. As he leaned over the one of the tubes and lit the fuse, the fireworks immediately went off striking him in the face. He was transported to a hospital where he was pronounced dead from head injuries.

A 6-inch fountain that shot colored fireballs injured a 4-year-old girl. When the fountain tipped over, the victim was struck in the chest by a fireball. She sustained second- and third- degree burns to her chest and neck. She was hospitalized for three weeks for burn treatment and skin grafts.

A 15-year-old male tied together the wires of 10 sparklers. The sparklers ignited quickly and burned down very fast, finally exploding in his hand. The victim sustained a five-inch long laceration to his hand and forearm exposing muscle. Also, debris from the explosion lodged in his hand and arm. The victim had plastic surgery and has recovered.

To help prevent incidents such as these, the federal government, under the Federal Hazardous Substances Act, prohibits the sale of the most dangerous types of fireworks to consumers. These banned fireworks include large reloadable mortar shells, cherry bombs, aerial bombs, M-80 salutes and larger firecrackers containing more than two grains of powder. Also banned are mail-order kits designed to build these fireworks.

All fireworks must carry a warning label describing necessary safety precautions and instructions for safe use. The Commission has issued a performance requirement to reduce the risk of potentially dangerous tip-over of large multiple tube mine and shell devices. Tip-over of these devices has resulted in two fatalities.

CPSC estimates that in 2003 about 9,300 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with fireworks. Over half the injuries were burns and most of the injuries involved the hands, eyes, and head. About half of the victims were under 15 years of age.

Fireworks should be used only with extreme caution. Older children should be closely supervised, and younger children should not be allowed to play with fireworks.

Before using fireworks, make sure they are permitted in your area. Many state and local governments prohibit or limit consumer fireworks, common fireworks and firecrackers sold for consumer use.

Consumer fireworks include shells and mortars, multiple tube devices, Roman Candles, rockets, sparklers, firecrackers with no more than 50 milligrams of powder and novelty items such as snakes, airplanes, ground spinners, helicopters, fountains and party poppers.

To help consumers use fireworks more safely, the CPSC offers these recommendations for fireworks safety:

- Do not allow young children to play with fireworks under any circumstances. Sparklers, considered by many the ideal "safe" firework for the young, burn at very high temperatures and can easily ignite clothing.
- Children cannot understand the danger involved and cannot act appropriately in case of emergency.
- Older children should only be permitted to use fireworks under close adult supervision. Do not allow any running or horseplay.
- Light fireworks outdoors in a clear area away from houses, dry leaves or grass and flammable materials.
- Keep a bucket of water nearby for emergencies and for pouring on fireworks that don't go off.
- Do not try to re-light or handle malfunctioning fireworks. Douse and soak them with water and throw them away.
- Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks.
- Never ignite fireworks in a container, especially a glass or metal container.
- Keep unused fireworks away from firing areas.
- Store fireworks in a dry, cool place. Check instructions for special storage directions.
- Observe local laws.
- Never have any portion of your body directly over a firework while lighting it.

- Do not experiment with homemade fireworks.

A final and important note to parents: Supervise any ordering and use of mail order "Make Your Own" fireworks kits.

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