



Fireworks frequently lead to injuries

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The Fourth of July can be a time of fun and celebration, but it can also be a time of serious injury or burns if fireworks are used improperly. To prevent unnecessary injury the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Alabama Department of Public Health strongly recommend that you leave fireworks to the professionals.

"Detonating these devices is best left to the professionals, because even fireworks that seem innocent can cause serious injury," said Carol Mysinger, director of the Injury Prevention Division at the Alabama Department of Public Health. "For example, sparklers, that are often used by young children, burn at temperatures of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit."

According to CPSC, in 2002 an estimated 8,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries associated with fireworks, with half of those people being under the age of 15. Over half of the injuries were burns and primarily involved the hands, eyes and head.

"We understand that people like to celebrate Independence Day with fireworks. However, improper use of fireworks or use of illegal fireworks can result in deaths, blindings, amputations and severe burns," said Melissa Khan, epidemiologist in the Injury Prevention Division.

The safest way to enjoy the dazzle of fireworks is at a community-sanctioned, licensed event. Alabama law allows only consumer fireworks, formerly known as class C fireworks. Some municipalities (including Montgomery) outlaw fireworks altogether.

If fireworks are legal where you live and you decide to set them off on your own, be sure to follow these important safety tips:

- * Never allow children to play with or ignite fireworks.
- * Read and follow all warnings and instructions.
- * Be sure other people are out of range before lighting fireworks.
- * Only light fireworks on a smooth, flat surface away from the house, dry leaves and flammable materials.
- * Never try to relight fireworks that have not fully functioned.
- * Keep a bucket of water nearby in case of a malfunction or fire.

As part of its fireworks enforcement program, CPSC prevents large numbers of hazardous fireworks from reaching consumers. Illegal mail order kits contain chemical mixtures that can explode unexpectedly and violently. M-80s, cherry bombs and quarter sticks are so highly explosive that they have been banned by federal law since 1966. Working with the U.S. Customs Service since 1988, CPSC has seized or detained more than 400 million hazardous fireworks at docks across the country.

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