

The Dangers of Fireworks

* Fireworks were the cause of 13 fatalities, 8,500 injuries, 7,000 fires, and \$40 million in property loss in 1998.

* State laws regulating the sale of fireworks have a direct impact on the incidence of loss. More stringent laws have been responsible for a decrease in injuries in the last decade—from a high of 12,100 in 1990 to a low of 7,800 in 1996.

* 70-75% of fireworks injuries occur during a 30-day period (June 23-July 23). In addition to Independence Day, other peak periods for injuries are New Year's Eve and other holidays.

* 45% of fireworks injuries are to children under the age of 15. Males are three times more likely than females to be injured.

Fireworks are enjoyable and exciting to watch, but each year they injure thousands of people, many of them children, and cause thousands of fires. Federal and state laws prohibit the sale of certain types of fireworks, but even those that are legal can be dangerous. For example, sparklers, which are legal in the majority of states, burn at temperatures of approximately 2,000 F.

To prevent injuries and property loss from fireworks, the federal government has banned the sale of the most dangerous types (Class B fireworks). These include M-80s, cherry bombs, firecrackers containing more than 50 milligrams of black powder, and mail order kits for building fireworks.

Federal, state, and local laws govern the manufacture and sale of legal fireworks (Class C).³

Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia allow some or all types of consumer fireworks. Ten states ban all consumer fireworks including **New Jersey**.

Despite this downward trend, fireworks remain dangerous. Each year, newspapers report numerous instances of people injured or killed by fireworks.

Of injuries caused by fireworks:

* 70 to 75% occur during a 30-day period surrounding July 4 (June 23– July 23)

* Seven out of 100 persons injured require hospitalization

* Males are three times more likely than females to be injured

* Boys between the ages of 10 and 14 have the highest rates of injury

* Common injuries are to the hands (34%), face (12%), and eyes (17%).¹²

Fireworks fires cause approximately \$15 million in property loss, injure 50, and kill 15 annually. Most fires are clustered around Independence Day, New Year's Eve, and other holidays or celebrations.

Fifty-seven percent of fires caused by fireworks occur in July, and nearly 20% occur on July 4th.

Given the high number of children injured by fireworks, it is not surprising that the most common ignition factor for fires related to fireworks is children playing with or otherwise misusing fireworks.

In addition to civilian injuries, fireworks fires are also deadly to firefighters. For example, in separate 1998 incidents in Alabama and Oklahoma, two firefighters were killed as a result of fires caused by fireworks.¹³

Because fireworks can be dangerous and deadly, the safest way to enjoy them is through public displays conducted by professional pyrotechnicians hired by communities over July 4 or at other times during the year.