

Fireworks are explosives, not toys

By Guest Columnist Jim Pollard

July 4 fireworks can be fun and beautiful, but they are always dangerous. Fireworks are explosives, not toys. Fireworks send thousands of people to the hospital each year and cause millions of dollars in fire losses. Paramedics at American Medical Response urge caution with fireworks to prevent disfiguring burns, loss of eyes and fingers and to avoid property fires. The safest way to enjoy fireworks is to attend a professionally-run show.

The National Fireworks Safety Council warns that certain fireworks are illegal in all fifty states. Those include M-80's, silver salutes and cherry bombs. Further, if your fireworks injure or kill someone or start a fire, you could be sued for hundreds of thousands (even millions) of dollars.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) says more than 11,000 people are injured from fireworks each year in the U.S. The Consumer Product Safety Commission says nearly half of those injured by fireworks are under the age of fifteen.

While fingers and hands are most often injured, the American Academy of Ophthalmology estimates fireworks annually cause nearly 2,000 eye injuries with permanent eye damage.

Bottle rockets are highly dangerous to the eyes, as they are essentially unguided missiles flying as fast as two hundred miles per hour.

Fireworks can also cause permanent hearing loss, second

and third degree burns and amputations. These injuries are extremely painful and can be emotionally and physically debilitating.

Sparklers are among the most common fireworks at private celebrations. Adults often let small children hold sparklers, because sparklers seem harmless -- but sparklers are dangerous. Sparklers get as hot as 2,000 degrees -- as hot as a blow torch. They can cause serious burns long after burning out.

The safe way to enjoy sparklers is to plant them in the ground away from

dry grass and then have an adult light them. Do not hold more than one sparkler at a time, and always stand when playing with sparklers. Hold sparklers at arm's length, away from the body. Do not run while holding them, do not hand a lit sparkler to anyone, and never carry a child who is holding a sparkler.



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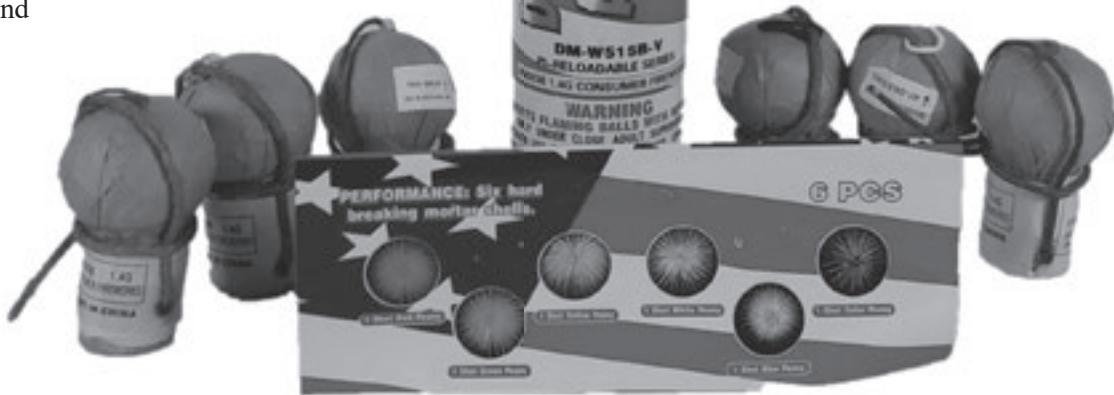
ing safety glasses or safety goggles. Prescription eyeglasses, sunglasses and contact lenses provide little or no protection from fireworks.

Don't use homemade fireworks, and never try to re-light or fix fireworks that have not gone off. Wait fifteen to twenty minutes before approaching a "dud," and then soak it with water. Once fireworks devices appear to have burned out, they should be soaked with water. It's a good idea to keep a bucket of water or a garden hose and a first aid kit handy. In case of eye injuries, do not touch, rub or press the injured eye. Call 9-1-1 for paramedics, who will treat the victim and safely transport him or her to a hospital. In case of burn injuries, cover the burns with a dry dressing, and call 9-1-1 for paramedic care.

Always follow local fireworks ordinances and related directives from police and fire personnel. *EDITOR'S NOTE: Jim Pollard, a paramedic since 1990, is the media relations lead in central Mississippi for American Medical Response (AMR).*

Never shoot fireworks after drinking alcohol.

Never point or throw fireworks at another person, and don't shoot devices near buildings, over roofs or near power lines. Always keep a safe distance from fireworks staging areas, and protect your eyes by wear-



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