Keep focused on safety with fireworks to avoid eye injuries: a NetWellness column
by Dr. Robert D. Newcomb/The Ohio State University
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What do plumbing, dairy products, bedding and stuffed toys, swimming pools, horse racing, and fireworks have in common? They are all regulated by state laws.

Ohio and other states control fireworks because they can cause serious injury, and even death.

Risk of Injury

About 12,000 people are evaluated each year in U.S. emergency departments because of fireworks-related injuries, according to the National Injury Surveillance System of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Of these, roughly 20 percent (approximately 2,300 to 3,600 people) will suffer eye injuries.

According to the American Optometric Association, more than half of these eye injuries occur in children under the age of 14. Injuries range from mild irritation of the eye to total disruption of the eyeball with permanent blindness. About 40 percent of patients with eye injuries will have some permanent damage to the eye.

Sparklers are very risky for children

Sparklers are a significant cause of serious eye injuries in children under the age of 5 years. They are especially dangerous in the hands of younger children because they are held, and often swung, near their eyes.
Sparklers burn at temperatures greater than 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit (water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit). A hot spark from a sparkler can cause a serious injury to the eyelid or cornea of the eye (See the National Eye Institute's Diagram of the Eye).

Fireworks and firecrackers

More powerful fireworks, such as Roman candles, bottle rockets, and cherry bombs, are illegal in Ohio and elsewhere because their explosive power can cause permanent disfigurement and disability -- such as loss of fingers, hands, limbs, and even blindness.

Firecrackers are the most common cause of fireworks-related eye injuries in teenagers and adults, but all forms of fireworks are potentially hazardous. Young children should not be allowed to play with any type of fireworks, and juveniles and adults need to recognize the danger of handling fireworks.

Be safe - leave the displays to the pros

The safest way for individuals and families to enjoy fireworks on the Fourth of July is to view public displays from a safe distance and leave the handling of fireworks to professionals.

Don't take chances with your eyes: one pair should last a lifetime.

Recommended web links

• Prevent Blindness Fireworks Safety

• National Eye Institute

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