

# Speaking Notes

## Firework Injuries

You may wish to choose sections of these speaking notes if you are planning a talk on firework safety. Please make sure that the sections you pick are relevant to your audience. Pick out those sections which will interest them and involve them in your presentation. For example, ask them to provide information and answers, such as where should pets be while you're setting off your fireworks or where did fireworks originate?

## History (Audience - any)

Fireworks were invented over 2,000 years ago in China. These days, they are used all around the world as part of national and religious celebrations.

As I'm sure you know, in this country they are used to celebrate November 5th - the anniversary of Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up Parliament.

Other countries use fireworks for different celebrations:

- American Independence Day on 4th July celebrates the signing of the Declaration of Independence. People throw street parties and parades and put on firework displays.
- The French celebrate the French Revolution of 1789 and the storming of the Bastille on 14th July with parties, parades and fireworks.
- In Germany, people traditionally let off fireworks on New Year's Eve. The skies are lit up from midnight well into the early hours of the morning.
- In China, the New Year falls about a month after our own and involves a two week long celebration. There is an outdoor festival of lanterns and firecrackers are let off to scare away evil spirits.

- Many Indians celebrate Diwali, a festival of light, in the last week of October or the first week of November with parties and fireworks.
- The Jewish equivalent is Hanukkah which falls around December or January. Candles and fireworks and the exchanging of gifts are important parts of this festival.
- In Canada, they even hold an annual World Fireworks Championship.

In countries all around the world, big organised firework displays are used for outdoor concerts, for state occasions and other major events.

According to the Guinness Book of Records, the world's largest firework display is held annually at Nagoaka-Shi in Japan, although the display which saw Hong Kong handed back to the Chinese must rate as one of the largest displays ever staged.

There'll probably be a record number of firework displays organised as part of the Millennium celebrations. Fireworks have become an important part of many of our celebrations and, of course, when organised properly, they can give tremendous joy and entertainment.

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## **Facts About Fireworks (Audience - any, particularly schools)**

Does anyone know what temperature a firework burns at? Well, a simple sparkler reaches a temperature of up to 2,000°C. That's over 15 times the boiling point of water. And that's why we constantly have to remind people to be so careful with any type of firework.

How fast does a firework travel?...Typically a rocket can reach 150 miles an hour.

And how high can a firework go?...Well, a shell fired from a mortar will go as high as 200 metres.

A couple more facts from the Guinness Book of Records: The largest ever single firework was a shell which measured one metre across and travelled over 300 metres into the air. It was so big and powerful, it had to be launched from a specially constructed launch pad made of concrete and steel.

And the record for the biggest number of rockets ever let off in one go was set at the Battle of Flowers Moonlight Parade in Jersey on 15 August 1997 when a staggering 39,210 rockets were simultaneously launched at the push of a button.

## **Firework Injuries (Audience - any)**

Fireworks cause hundreds of avoidable injuries every year.

In the last five years (1994-1998) over 6000 people were hurt and required hospital treatment. In the same period, there were three deaths caused by aerial shells. In 1998 alone, there were 831 injuries... but thankfully no deaths. In 1998 the highest number of injuries (320) occurred at family or private parties, followed by incidents in the street or other public places (226) and large public displays (132).

According to government statistics, the most common firework injuries in 1998 were caused by rockets (168), bangers (130) and sparklers (129).

The safe use of sparklers - the theme of the

1998 firework safety campaign - helped reduce the number of sparkler injuries by 36% (from 200 in 1997 to 129 in 1998). We were extremely pleased with that result and it proves that people will listen to commonsense firework safety messages. One problem which continues to cause concern is the large number of firework injuries resulting from children misusing fireworks.

Before you start thinking that it's not going to happen to you, consider this. Last year nearly half of all injuries happened to children under 16 years of age. That's a lot of kids who may have ugly burn scars or have lost an eye or a finger.

## **How Firework Injuries Happen (Audience - any)**

Every year we see injuries that are caused through people not handling fireworks properly. And it's always because simple common sense rules about handling fireworks are forgotten. Here are some of the main causes of injury:

- Not following instructions - if you are going to let off fireworks in the garden follow the instructions very carefully.
- Lighting too many fireworks at once - this doesn't give you time to get out of the way. Sparklers should only be lit one at a time and, like other fireworks, always by an adult. A bunch of sparklers if lit together can result in a flame travelling up the sparklers and burning your hand.
- Going back to a firework once it's been lit - everyone has heard of the dangers of going back to a lit firework that you don't think has ignited, but then it ignites as you approach it.
- Lack of supervision - in a garden there should be one adult in charge of lighting fireworks. And, don't take your own fireworks to organised events as letting fireworks off in a crowd is extremely dangerous. That includes sparklers.

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- Getting too close to fireworks - there are guidelines about the safe distances spectators should stand away from fireworks. Be aware of this - and remember - nobody should ever handle fireworks or be tempted to put them in their pockets.

### Other things to bear in mind:

- If you are using sparklers, have a bucket of water nearby. When sparklers have gone out they should be put in the water.
- Never throw discarded fireworks onto bonfires. Some spent fireworks still have powder left in them and some fireworks which have not gone off will still contain all their explosives. Throwing them onto bonfires can result in accidents.
- Make sure you wear the right clothing - you should always wear gloves (especially when holding sparklers). Do not wear shell suits or other nylon clothing which melts against the skin, nor should you wear open neck shirts, T-shirts or shorts where bare skin is exposed to the danger of fireworks. Remember to tuck scarves in so they don't catch alight.
- Don't fool with fireworks. It's not worth the risk.

### Alcohol and Fireworks (Audiences - only teenage and older)

Firework parties with family and friends have become increasingly popular in recent years... and the likelihood is that the numbers will increase enormously as 1999 comes to an end and we celebrate the new Millennium.

Parties, of course, usually involve the consumption of alcohol. In fact, research shows that at 90% of firework parties in back gardens, alcohol is present.

The same research shows that 84% of respondents said that people setting off their fireworks had consumed at least 2-3 units of alcohol (2-3 cans of

beer/lager or several glasses of wine). One respondent said he was so drunk that he had to let someone else take over the lighting of the fireworks.

Not only does the consumption of alcohol increase the risk of injury in these circumstances, it also affects the ability of the adults to properly supervise children during the display.

Here's some commonsense advice to add to the well-known Fireworks Code:

- Never drink alcohol if you are setting off fireworks or tending a bonfire.
- Nominate responsible persons who are not drinking alcohol to take charge of late night firework displays on New Year's Eve.
- If guests at your party are drinking alcohol, keep them well away from fireworks and the bonfire.
- Consider limiting the availability of alcoholic drinks until after all your fireworks have been set off.
- Don't carry fireworks in your pocket to street parties or celebrations.
- Have an enjoyable party, but remember, alcohol and fireworks don't mix.

Also see the separate fact sheet 'Ten things you should know about alcohol!' which is included in the tool kit.

### Legislation (Audience - any)

I'd like to turn now to looking at the law as it concerns you and fireworks.

The age limit for buying most fireworks is 18. And remember, sparklers are fireworks too. In addition, all sparkler packets must carry the warning: "Warning: not to be given to children under five years of age." Since the end of 1997, it has been against the law to sell or supply bangers, aerial shells, mini-rockets and some types of bigger Roman Candles. These should not be available to the public.

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## Illegal to Supply

No one should buy fireworks other than responsible adults who are going to supervise the use of those fireworks in their own garden. It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be sold fireworks including sparklers, apart from some, such as party poppers, which can be sold to persons over 16 years of age. The age was raised because there have been too many injuries in the past.

## Illegal for Shopkeepers

It is illegal to break open retail packs of fireworks and sell them individually. Some fireworks are intended to be sold individually, but they do not come in packs. The reason why packs must not be broken open is that the instructions for using the fireworks safely are printed on the packet and not on the individual firework.

## Illegal to use in a Public Place

You may not be aware that it is an offence punishable by fine to let fireworks off in a public place. So how do you define a public place? It is simply anywhere other than in your own back garden. The street outside is a public place, as is the council park, the bus station, the schoolyard, the football stadium, the youth centre.

## British Standard (BS 7114)

Fireworks are safer now than they have been in the past. If used properly and in accordance with instructions there is very little chance of anyone getting injured. About ten years ago a British Standard known as BS 7114 was introduced. This is a safety standard which sets out specifications and test procedures for fireworks. For example, fireworks complying with BS 7114:

- are limited as to the explosive content
- have recommended safe distances for viewing them
- have strict times for how long the fuse will burn to enable people to move out of the way.

Never buy or use fireworks which do not show on the labels that they comply with BS 7114.

## Firework Code (Audience - any)

There is a firework code designed to reduce the likelihood of injuries and help people enjoy November 5th and events like the Millennium celebrations. The advice to any adult letting off fireworks is that they only do so in their own garden and they follow the firework code:

1. Only buy fireworks marked BS 7114
2. Don't drink alcohol if setting off fireworks
3. Keep fireworks in a closed box
4. Follow the instructions on each firework carefully
5. Light them at arm's length using a suitable taper
6. Stand well back
7. Never go back to a lit firework
8. Never put fireworks in your pocket
9. Never throw fireworks
10. Light sparklers one at a time and wear gloves
11. Never give sparklers to children under five
12. Keep pets indoors

## And finally...

**Remember that alcohol and fireworks don't mix.**

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