



# GIVING TALKS? THEN THESE NOTES MAY

**help you get the firework safety message across**

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?"

## **A brief history of fireworks (Audience – any)**

Legend has it that the Chinese made the first fireworks in the 800s, filling bamboo shoots with gunpowder and exploding them at New Year with the hope the sound would scare away evil spirits.

Fireworks became known in Europe during the 1300s, probably after returning Crusaders brought them back from the East.

In this country, fireworks are used to celebrate November 5 – the anniversary of Guy Fawkes' (failed) attempt to blow up Parliament.

Other countries use fireworks for different celebrations:

- People living in the United States of America mark the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4 with parties and firework displays across the country.
- The French celebrate the French Revolution of 1789 and the storming of the Bastille on July 14 with parties, parades and fireworks.
- In China, the New Year falls about a month after our own and involves a two-week long celebration, with an outdoor festival of lanterns and firecrackers being let off to scare away evil spirits.
- Many Indians celebrate Diwali, 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, fireworks and the exchanging of gifts are important parts of this festival.
- Fireworks are let off to mark Canada Day on July 1 and the same country holds an annual World Fireworks Championship.



**Fireworks are explosives**  
**GET WISE OR GET HURT**

## Follow the clues to fireworks safety (Audience - children over 5 and young people)

Fireworks are great fun to watch, but every year lots of young people get hurt in firework accidents. Make sure you're not one of them by following clues to firework safety

1. Never play with fireworks – they are explosives and can hurt you.
2. Only adults should light or hold fireworks.
3. When you are watching fireworks, stand well back.
4. Never go near a firework that has been lit. Even if it hasn't gone off, it could still explode.

### If you are given sparklers:

- Hold them one at a time
  - Always wear gloves
  - Hold sparklers at arm's length
  - When a sparkler goes out, DON'T TOUCH IT. It could still burn you, so put it hot end down in a bucket of water.
- Remember, you have to be 18 years old before you are allowed to buy fireworks in the shops.

### The firework safety code for adults

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.
5. Light them at arms length, using a taper.
6. Stand well back.
7. Never go near a firework that has been lit. Even if it hasn't gone off, it could still explode.
8. Never put fireworks in your pocket or throw them.
9. Always supervise children around fireworks.
10. Light sparklers one at a time and wear gloves.
11. Never give sparklers to a child under five.
12. Keep pets indoors.

### And remember...

**Fireworks are explosives...fooling with them can mess you up.**

**Fireworks are explosives**  
**GET WISE OR GET HURT**



### **Fascinating 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. That's why we constantly have to remind people to be so careful with any type of firework. It is particularly important to never give sparklers to children under 5 and to supervise the over 5s.

***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.

### **Injuries caused by accidents with fireworks (Audience – any)**

Fireworks cause hundreds of avoidable injuries every year.

In the last five years (1996-2000) 2,258 people were hurt and required hospital treatment. In the same period there were four deaths. In 2000 there were 972 injuries and regrettably two deaths. In 2000 the highest number of injuries - 421 - occurred at family or private parties, followed by incidents in the street or other public places and large public displays.

Government statistics show that the most common firework injuries in 2000 were caused by rockets (135), sparklers (104) and bangers (93).

The safe use of sparklers has been a recurring theme in firework safety campaigns. After recording a small increase in the number of sparkler accidents in 1999 there was a reduction of 22% (from 134 in 1999 to 104 in 2000). One problem which continues to cause concern is the large number of firework injuries to children. A lot of these are caused by children messing about with fireworks. That's why the theme of our safety campaign this year will again be targeted at children and young people.

Before you start thinking that it's not going to happen to you, consider this. Last year just over half of all injuries happened to children under the age of 16 years of age. That's a lot of kids who may have ugly burn scars – for life.

### **Common sense is important (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 flares up as you approach it. But people still chance their luck. So try and remember, it's just not worth the risk.
- Lack of supervision – in the 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.
- 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 be tempted to put them in their pockets.

### **Remember, remember**

- If you are using sparklers, have a bucket of water nearby. When sparklers have gone out they should be put hot end down in the water.
- Never throw discarded fireworks onto bonfires. Some spent fireworks still have gunpowder 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 nylon clothing, which melts against the skin, and don't 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. They are explosives and can really mess you up.

### **Alcohol and fireworks – an explosive combination (Audiences – only teenage and older)**

Firework parties with family and friends have become increasingly popular in recent years.

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 firework displays.
- If guests at your party are drinking alcohol, keep them well away from fireworks and the bonfire.
- Consider limiting the availability of alcohol 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.

### **Keep on the right side of the law**

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. All sparkler packets must carry the words "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 to the public.

### **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 to shopkeepers**

It is illegal to break open retail packs of fireworks and sell them individually. Some fireworks are intended to be sold individually, but these do not come in packs. The reason why packs must not be broken open is that many of 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? For simplicity regard it as 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. Twelve 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.