

Script – Print – Red, white and boom – safely

It won't be long before it's the Fourth of July and we hear the whistling and thunderous booms of fireworks streaking through the sky.

And while "consumer" fireworks such as bottle rockets, skyrockets and roman candles are illegal in Illinois, according to the state's [Pyrotechnic Use Act](#), others are considered non-consumer fireworks including sparklers, smoke bombs and party poppers.

But that doesn't make them completely safe.

In 2023, the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) received approximately 9,700 reports of injuries and eight deaths because of fireworks. And it's not just injuries that happen on July 4. According to CPSC, 66% of injuries happened before and after the holiday.

Stathis Poulakidas, MD, the burn center medical director at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center in Rockford, says the number of injuries reported is probably low, given the number of people who don't immediately seek treatment.

"The simplest of fireworks, which anybody would think is a sparkler, can burn up to 1,800 degrees," says Dr. Poulakidas. "The first thing everybody wants to do is hand the baby the sparkler and say, 'go ahead. Run around and have a good time.' But then it falls to their shoes, they burn horrifically. So not even the simplest of fireworks is safe."

Another problem is the combination of adults drinking alcohol while handling fireworks. Dr. Poulakidas says this lethal mix puts you and those around you at your gathering in danger. "I see more adults than I see children with firework injuries," he says. "The only children we see are the ones that are too close to the actual fireworks, as the adults are manipulating them while intoxicated. Then the fireworks injure the child."

According to the CPSC, 41% of the injuries were to the head, eyes, face and ears. Another 35% are hands and fingers; 42% of injuries were burns.

That's where Dr. Poulakidas comes in. In the burn center, he sees some of the worst injuries because of fireworks mishaps. He calls it the blast effect, which can severely injure intestines, eyes and rupture eardrums, given the proximity of the fireworks and the loud explosion. "We'll see minor burns to the hands, to the face. We'll see digits or fingers get blown off," he says. "We've seen whole hands blown off and people lose arms." (2:25-2:36)

And if clothing catches on fire, Dr. Poulakidas says there's a greater likelihood of second degree burns to your chest, arms and legs, which could lead to treatment options that include skin grafting.

Bottom line: Dr. Poulakidas encourages people of all ages to have fun this year. But sit back, watch the spectacle and let the experts handle the fireworks. "We want everybody to use good judgment and safe measures to prevent injury," he says. "Because I think prevention is the key, instead of dealing with an injury after something has occurred."

Fireworks Safety Tips (courtesy of CPSC)

- Never allow children to play with or ignite fireworks, including sparklers.
- Make sure fireworks are legal in your area before buying or using them.
- Keep a bucket of water or garden hose handy in case of fire.
- Never try to re-light or pick up fireworks that haven't fully ignited.
- Never use fireworks while impaired by drugs or alcohol.