

BONFIRE SAFETY ADVICE

This information is intended for those organisers who are mounting firework displays or organising bonfires for the general public. It contains important information about your responsibilities to the public and the staff involved.

Remember that safety is the key to having a safe and successful bonfire, anytime of the year.

How to start planning your display

- Running a display takes a lot of work, so try to share the load by planning ahead
- Set up a committee whose members can each take responsibility for a particular task (including one person to be in charge of all safety arrangements)
- Be clear on who will do what and when
- Be sure each member has a photocopy of this guide and follows its advice
- If possible, try to recruit at least one person with previous experience of firework displays
- Remember – fireworks not marked with 'Complies with BS 7114 Part 2 1988' are suitable for use only by professionals.

Keep the authorities informed of your plans

November 5th and New Year's Eve will be busy times for the authorities so give them plenty of warning about your plans.

You should contact:

- The Local Fire and Rescue Service
- The Police Local Authority.

Things to do in advance

As well as liaising with the local authority, Police and Fire and Rescue organisations, you or your appropriate team member should:

- Arrange for your fireworks to be delivered and stored securely (and circulate the manufacturers' general instructions to your team)
- Arrange for you and your team to be trained in the various tasks for the night, including all emergency drills
- Arrange for first aid posts to be manned by qualified people. Borrow or hire special clothing (bibs, jackets etc) to identify you and your team on the night
- Arrange some form of public address system – as a safety measure, not just for commentary. A loud hailer will do as a bare minimum
- Arrange for fire extinguishers, buckets of water, buckets of sand and metal litter bins to be available on the night
- Check that plenty of electric torches will be available on the night, with full batteries
- Publicise the fact that spectators are not allowed to bring their own fireworks (including sparklers) and will not be admitted if they do so
- Prepare all necessary signs
- Make absolutely sure that you'll have enough people available on the night (including some cover for illness)

- Draw up a detailed checklist of tasks and indicate who is to be responsible for each one
- Check whether you are adequately insured to cover any firework-related injuries to those present at the display
- Vet any traders you intend to allow on the site
- Animals can be terrified by fireworks. Warn your neighbours and local farmers in advance so they can keep pets indoors and take other necessary precautions

Choosing the best site

You should choose a large, clear and well-mown area free from obstructions, well away from any buildings, trees and hazards like overhead cables, with as many safe entrances and exits as possible. These must be away from the firing area and dropping zone.

Make sure that all entrances are well lit, clearly sign-posted and kept free from obstructions. Clear away any undergrowth or very long grass. Have plenty of (metal) litter bins around the site. Make sure you can cater properly for disabled spectators. Watch out for any animals likely to be housed nearby. Allow at least 50m x 20m for your firing area. Beyond this you will need a dropping zone for spent fireworks of 100m x 50m in the downwind direction. Spectators should be kept back on the opposite side to the dropping zone at least 25m from the firing area.

Provide a designated car park

Falling fireworks can cause damage, so site any designated car parking well away from your display area and dropping zone and upwind of the display. Signpost any car park clearly and make sure that the entrance is quite separate from pedestrian access.

- Do not permit parking anywhere else
- Crowd control arrangements
- Proper crowd control is essential and needs good planning
- Arrange for some stewards to be responsible for just this – at least one steward for every 250 spectators. Their job won't be finished until the display is over; the site is cleared and made safe
- Your stewards should be easy to identify, perhaps with fluorescent bibs or jackets
- Be certain that your team know what to do in an emergency and have practised safety drills
- Spectators must not be allowed into your display area. If they do encroach, stop the display immediately. Prepare and erect signs to clearly show the area
- Beware of overcrowding – seek advice from the Fire & Rescue Service and follow it
- Fireworks and alcohol don't mix. This will make crowd control more difficult
- None of the organisers should have alcoholic drinks
- Do not allow spectators to enter the site with their own fireworks – even sparklers
- Make sure that there are signs explaining this at all entrances.

Letting off the fireworks

- Take great care at all times
- Recruit people with previous experience of firework displays. Have as few people as possible actually involved with the fireworks
- Do not allow smoking by your team when fireworks are being handled, or at any time during the display

- Unpack fireworks with great care and well away from any open fire, naked flame or flammable material. Remember that they are fragile and can easily be broken. Keep fireworks in a secure box which is kept closed
- Before lighting any firework, read the instructions on it carefully (by torchlight)
- Make sure that the wind and the display are angled away from spectators
- For lighting display type fireworks, a device called a Portfire is often provided by the manufacturer. Use Portfires when available and always light fireworks at arm's length
- Keep unused Portfires in a metal or wooden box and never carry them in pockets
- Alternative forms of safety lighters, such as a slow match, are often available
- Never use matches or lighters for lighting fireworks at a display. If any firework fails to go off, don't go back to it. It could still be live and could go off in your face. Half an hour is the absolute minimum time to wait before you consider approaching it again.

A sudden change of wind could cause aerial fireworks to fall dangerously among spectators. In very windy weather, you should consider putting off the display altogether, however disappointing that might be.

If you're planning a bonfire

- Bonfires need a lot of organising and can be a hazard. Many displays are a great success without one. If, after careful consideration, you do decide to have a bonfire, make one person responsible for it, from early planning to final clearing up
- Don't site it too near your display or firework storage area
- Never use flammable liquids like paraffin or petrol to get it going as this can result in uncontrolled spread of fire or explosion
- Check immediately before lighting that there's no animal or even a young child hidden inside
- Never put fireworks on a bonfire, even if they're dud
- Don't burn dangerous rubbish (e.g. aerosols, tires, paint tins or foam-filled furniture)
- Remove any rubbish from your bonfire area in advance so there's nothing that can be thrown onto the fire on the night.

When it's all over

The work for you and your team doesn't finish when the last firework goes off.

- Spectators need to be cleared safely from the site
- The bonfire needs to be put out completely
- Spent firework cases must be gathered. Spot used fireworks with a torch and use tongs or some other suitable tool, and wear strong gloves
- Don't allow any children to collect firework cases
- Burning the spent cases is potentially dangerous and should be done with great care only after all your spectators have gone
- If any fireworks look as if they haven't gone off after at least half an hour, douse them in a bucket of water and ask the Fire and Rescue Service for advice.

Most of all

Enjoy it! Safely