

United States Eye Injury Registry
1201 11th Avenue South, Suite 300
Birmingham, Alabama 35205



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To The Editor:

As a practicing ophthalmologist (MD eye care specialist) and an Eye Trauma Surgeon, I am writing to encourage my fellow Americans to celebrate Independence Day this year by attending public fireworks displays instead of using fireworks at home. I make these requests for the following reasons:

1. Approximately 12,000 Americans are treated in Emergency Departments annually for fireworks related injuries. Of these, it is estimated that 20% are eye injuries.
2. As many as 400 Americans lose vision in one or both eyes each year due to eye injuries caused by fireworks.
3. Most fireworks injuries occurred around the Independence Day Holiday with a second large group of injuries occurring around New Years.
4. Children, 16 years and younger, account for 60% of fireworks eye injuries in the US.
5. Nearly one-half of all fireworks eye injuries are inflicted on bystanders.
6. By far, the most dangerous type of firework is the bottle rocket. The bottle rocket flies erratically, frequently injuring bystanders, and the bottle or cans used to launch them often explode, showering fragments of glass or metal in all directions.
7. Sparklers, often thought of as the "safe" firework and given to small children, burn at 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit (nearly hot enough to melt gold) and cause third degree burns.

The United States Eye Injury Registry (USEIR), was patterned after the Eye Injury Registry of Alabama, a project of the Alabama Academy of Ophthalmology. The USEIR is a federation of individual registries, based in Birmingham, Alabama, formed to collect and study data on serious eye injury in the United States. The USEIR recommends that persons attend public fireworks displays, however, if persons choose to use fireworks, we suggest that they never use bottle rockets and when other fireworks are used that eye protection be worn by operators and spectators or bystanders. Young children should never use fireworks and parents should take an active role in supervising the use of fireworks by older children. Fireworks should be used only outdoors. A source of water should always be nearby to douse malfunctioning fireworks in case of fire. Instructions should be read and followed carefully and you should never re-light malfunctioning fireworks or use "homemade" fireworks.

Attending a public fireworks display on the Fourth of July is a safe and patriotic way to honor our tradition of independence, our shared values, and our hopes for a healthy future.

Sincerely,

Ferenc Kuhn, MD, PhD