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Sarasota County warns residents about use of fireworks

"We want everyone to have a safe Fourth of July and to remind everyone about fireworks safety," said Sarasota County Fire Chief Brian Gorski.

"There are great, safe alternatives to using fireworks on the Fourth of July," Gorski added. "Attend one of the public fireworks displays in Sarasota or the other cities with your family and have a safe holiday.

"All fireworks are dangerous," Gorski warned. "There's no such a thing as safe fireworks. And when things go wrong with fireworks, they go wrong very fast."

Fireworks are dangerous for many reasons:

- Fireworks can amputate fingers and other extremities.
- Fireworks can cause severe burns and scars that that can last a lifetime.
- Even sparklers reach temperatures above 1,200 degrees F and can severely burn users and bystanders.
- Sparkler wires are extremely hot even after they're used and can cause serious burns. The wires can cause injuries even after they're cool.
- The risk of injury is 2.5 times greater for children and teenagers.
- A homeowner's insurance policy may not cover an injury or damage if caused by fireworks.

Fireworks every year cause nationwide injuries and damage:

- Fireworks caused an estimated 32,600 fires in 2007 that included 1,700 home fires, 600 vehicle fires, and 30,300 outside fires.
- Six people died from fireworks-related accidents.
- Fireworks caused \$34 million in property damage.
- On the July 4 holiday, fireworks cause more fires in the United States than all other causes of fire combined.

Gorski also urged residents to use common sense when using legal fireworks:

- Don't hold them in your hand.
- Light them and stand at a safe distance.
- Don't endanger others.

Florida Statute 791 and Florida Administrative Code 5A-3 establishes the rules and guidelines for the sale and use of fireworks. Sarasota County also has adopted an ordinance that establishes a permitting process for their use in accordance to this statute and the Florida Administrative Code.

“What’s legal and what’s not is pretty simple,” Gorski said. “If it leaves the ground or explodes, or does both, it’s illegal unless it’s being used in accordance to Florida Statute 791. The only legal fireworks are sparkler-type fireworks – those that shoot off sparks but don’t lift off the ground or explode.”

The state Fire Marshall has prepared a list of what’s permitted and what’s prohibited. The list is available online at the State Fire Marshal’s Web site. Fireworks specifically prohibited include firecrackers, mortars, torpedoes, skyrockets and Roman candles.

Fireworks can only be used for the following purposes:

- Public display events for which a permit has been obtained.
- Railroad or other transportation agencies for signal purposes or illumination.
- Quarrying, blasting or other industrial use.
- Blank cartridges used for show, theater or in ceremonial purposes for athletics or sport events.
- Frightening birds from agricultural works and fish hatcheries. This is governed by the rules of Chapter 5-A-3 of the FAC.