



Naval Safety Command

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 22-14

FIREWORKS MISHAPS III

“As soon as I saw the green light...I knew something dangerous was about to happen”

— Jason Pierre-Paul (NFL Linebacker) the moment before a large firework exploded in his hand.

While much of the nation cancelled July 4th public fireworks celebrations in 2020 during the pandemic, many Americans, including some of our Sailors and Marines seem to have taken matters into their own “hands.”... *literally*. A 2020 U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission report found a **50 percent increase** in deaths and injuries from fireworks-related incidents. Unfortunately, our services contributed to those injuries (*but thankfully not deaths*) despite our best efforts to sound the alarm and educate them on fireworks safety.



We're not giving up! While we're not doing terribly in the fireworks mishap category, we found more than enough examples to make the case for the need to be more responsible around fireworks.

If you want to see a fantastic fireworks show, let the professionals handle it. If you must host your own show (making sure they're legal in your area), please read and internalize these examples of how poor decisions led to painful and avoidable consequences.

- **Don't Mind If I Do**. A Sailor rode his four-wheeler to a gathering area where people were lighting fireworks. We're hoping he was wearing a helmet and had adequate lights for the late hour, but that's a topic for another Dispatch. Upon arrival, the Sailor “accepted a firework and proceeded to light it,” according to the report. The wick of the — *welcome to the party* — firework burned much faster than the Sailor expected and exploded in his hand as he was in mid throw. The explosion was severe enough that the Sailor needed to apply a belt as a tourniquet and call 911 for additional help. He drove himself back to the road (*another poor choice of action*) and waited for the ambulance. The emergency medical technicians applied a dressing to his hand and gave him pain medication. He was airlifted to the local hospital, where surgery was performed to amputate his middle finger to the first knuckle and to the second of his index finger. *This is the first of a few examples demonstrating the “unwiseness” of holding lit fireworks in your hand. We hope this, and the forthcoming burnt hand examples makes our case for responsible fireworks use.*

- **Misfire. Misfire Misfire!** A Marine was lighting personally bought fireworks. When one of them didn't explode in a timely manner, “he waited about 20 seconds before grabbing the tube/firework at which time the firework exploded in his right hand.” While the 20 second wait was a good first step, grabbing the firework wasn't the correct follow-on procedure. *Unlike misfire procedures for military mortars, there is no touching the civilian firework after lighting it. Keeping a water source close by to douse the unexploded firework would have saved this Marine the severe pain and the 30 stitches. Read the instructions, folks, your body parts will thank you.*

- **(Not) Just Like A Good Neighbor**. A Sailor was celebrating the July 4th holiday at home with family and neighbors. At around 9 pm, a couple of people in the group started lighting fireworks in the street in front of their homes. The Sailor was in his driveway playing with his children when one of the neighbors lit a firecracker and threw it within 10-12 feet of the Sailor. When the firecracker (*or multiple firecrackers*) “started going off,” the Sailor turned to see them when a piece of a firecracker struck him in his left eye. *Fortunately, this Sailor suffered some pain, but was later fully cleared by an optometrist.*

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This lesson is more for the neighbor, or anyone thinking of throwing firecrackers at their friends. The saying “It’s all fun and games until someone loses an eye,” isn’t funny when it’s your eye.

- Hey That Firecracker Is Li... A Sailor was “holding fireworks, grabbed firework from person, went off in hand,” is how the narrative reads. Simple, to the point. *Unfortunately the outcome was similar to previously mentioned fireworks-in-hand examples. Fortunately for this Sailor, he only suffered burns to his left thumb, but kept all his fingers otherwise intact. Don’t hold lit fireworks, please, and confirm their status before grabbing them.*



- Choose Your Friends Wisely. On July 4th, a Sailor was observing a fireworks display at a local lake. He was holding a firework in his right hand for approximately three to five minutes (yes, *here comes another firework-in-hand mishap*) when someone decided to light it. Upon realizing the firework was ignited, the Sailor attempted to throw it, but all too late. The firework exploded in his hand causing third degree burns on his right palm. The Sailor was transported to local hospital, treated for burns to the right hand and received 14 days light duty. No witnesses confirmed who ignited the firework or admitted to the action. *True friends will eagerly lend you a hand, not try to blow one of yours off. Adding to the advice in this example’s subtitle, maintaining situational awareness of anything explosive in your hands at all times will reduce the odds of you needing to unfriend someone.*

- 3...2...1...Wait! A Sailor was visiting family in Mexico and lighting fireworks (*No this one isn’t another hand incident...it’s worse*). During the course of lighting off fireworks, one of them in a tube (*presumably a mortar type*) fell over after it was ignited and fired toward the Sailor. Unable to move out of the path of the firework, the Sailor was struck in the left side of his face causing lacerations, three fractures and internal eye socket bleeding (*yikes!*). *There are instructions and videos on how to properly set up mortar fireworks tubes, also called artillery-style fireworks. Making sure they are secured on level ground in a stable position are key. Remember, fireworks aren’t supposed to travel horizontally, that’s bad. Vertical is good.*

Key Takeaways

If you’ve read our previous two fireworks products, these takeaways will look familiar. Check out Lesson Learned 20-14 and 21-16, Fireworks and Fireworks II on our webpage in the Safety Awareness Products section. We also have a link to our fireworks safety video in the Safety Promotions section here. <https://www.youtube.com/NavalSafetyCommand>

1. **Fireworks are for adults, who act like adults.** Fireworks are pyrotechnics and should be treated with the respect they deserve. Read and heed the instructions and warnings just as you would at the demolition range. Haven’t performed military demolition before? We think you still get the point.
2. **Hands off the fireworks.** This takeaway should be a no-brainer, but we continue to see examples of Sailors and Marines losing digits and suffering severe burns from handling lit fireworks. Use an extended lighting instrument and keep a safe stand off distance. Keep your unused fireworks at a safe distance too so you don’t shoot off a couple hundred dollars of fireworks unintentionally and spend what should have been a fun July 4th in the emergency room. We hope there’s not a need for another list; “things not to do with your hands,” but it seems inevitable.
3. **Alcohol and fireworks don’t mix.** While none of the examples in this Dispatch admitted to alcohol being a factor, none of the reports showed “no” in the “was alcohol a factor?” block — hmm. In another no-brainer takeaway, someone responsible and sober should be in charge of the fireworks. Add, “don’t drink and shoot fireworks” to our very long list of things to not drink and do.

And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”