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FIREWORKS POSE DANGEROUS RISKS, ESPECIALLY TO CHILDREN

More than 40 Percent of All Fireworks Injuries are to Children Under the Age of 15

CHICAGO – With planning for Fourth of July celebrations already in full swing, Prevent Blindness America, the nation's oldest eye health and safety organization, is urging the public to refrain from purchasing or using fireworks. In 2007, approximately 6,300 Americans were treated in emergency rooms across the country due to fireworks-related injuries around the Independence Day holiday, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

Unfortunately, more than 40 percent of all fireworks injuries were to children under the age of 15. In fact, sparklers accounted for the most injuries that required medical attention to children ages 4 and under. Some may be surprised to learn that sparklers were associated with the most number of injuries to both adults and children. According to the National Fire Protection Association, "safe and sane" fireworks caused more injuries than illegal fireworks, especially to preschool children.

The second most common injury from fireworks is to the eyes, including contusions and lacerations, debris in the eye and burns. For example, a case was reported to the CPSC regarding a 6-year-old girl who was holding a Roman candle firework. The sparks that emitted from the Roman candle entered her eye and she required immediate medical treatment from an emergency room.

"We hear the term 'safe and sane' fireworks and think that they are harmless, but a sparkler can burn at up to 1,800 degrees," said Hugh R. Parry, president and CEO of Prevent Blindness America. "Roman candles, firecrackers and bottle rockets may seem enticing, especially to children. But they can be very dangerous and that is why Prevent Blindness America wants to make sure that consumers are aware of these dangers and make sure they protect their eyes."

Tragically, fireworks can go beyond injuries and even result in death. In 2007, a 7-year-old boy was killed when a 2-inch mortar shell tipped over just before igniting and struck the boy in the chest. And, a 4-year-old boy died after lighting fireworks he found in a closet. The intense heat of the fire in the home prevented rescuers from reaching him in time.

Prevent Blindness America urges everyone to attend only authorized public fireworks displays conducted by licensed operators. Attendees should also be aware, however, that even professional displays can be hazardous and should use extreme caution.

Prevent Blindness America offers its “First Aid for Eye Emergencies” sticker in both English and Spanish, free to the public, and recommends the following should an eye injury occur:

If there are specks in the eye,

- DO NOT rub the eye.
- Use an eye wash or let tears wash out specks or particles;
- Lift the upper eyelid outward and down over the lower lid;
- If the speck doesn’t wash out, keep the eye closed, bandage and see a doctor or go to the emergency room.

If the eye or eyelid is cut or punctured,

- DO NOT wash out the eye with water.
- DO NOT try to remove an object stuck in the eye.
- Cover the eye with a rigid shield without pressure. The bottom half of a paper cup may be used. See a doctor or go to the emergency room immediately.

Prevent Blindness America also offers a free brochure, “Safe Summer Celebrations” with creative ideas for the family on how to celebrate the holiday without fireworks. For a free copy of the Safe Summer Celebrations brochure, more information on fireworks safety or to request a First Aid for Eye Emergencies sticker, call (800) 331-2020 or log on to preventblindness.org.

About Prevent Blindness America

Founded in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight. Focused on promoting a continuum of vision care, Prevent Blindness America touches the lives of millions of people each year through public and professional education, advocacy, certified vision screening and training, community and patient service programs and research. These services are made possible through the generous support of the American public. Together with a network of affiliates, divisions and chapters, it's committed to eliminating preventable blindness in America. For more information, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call (800) 331-2020 or visit us on the Web at preventblindness.org.

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