

Video clip of sparkler demonstration available at www.nfpa.org

Consumer fireworks risks exposed by leading health and safety advocates

Washington, D.C., *June 22, 2006* – Each July Fourth, thousands of people, most often children and teens, are injured while using consumer fireworks. Despite the dangers of fireworks, few people understand the associated risks. To prevent future tragedies, a group of 21 health and safety organizations – the Alliance to Stop Consumer Fireworks – urged the public, at a press conference today in Washington D.C., to avoid any use of consumer fireworks, including sparklers, as this year's Independence Day celebrations get underway.

“Every year nearly 10,000 people have to go to emergency rooms because of fireworks injuries,” said James M. Shannon, president and CEO of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), who along with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), founded the alliance four years ago. “Consumer fireworks hurt thousands of people and if we continue to use them, we are simply continuing a holiday tradition of causing serious injuries. We cannot keep putting these dangerous devices in the hands of our children.”

In 2004, sparklers, fountains, and novelties accounted for 40 percent of all emergency room fireworks injuries. And, the damage from fireworks goes beyond injuries. In a typical year, during the Independence Day holiday, fireworks cause more fires in the U.S. than all other causes of fire combined.

Also speaking at the event were Ed Altizer, Virginia State Fire Marshal representing the International Fire Marshals Association, Dr. Mary Pat McKay, from George Washington University Medical Center and Dr. Stephen Baker, a plastic surgeon Georgetown University Hospital.

As a part of the group's efforts, NFPA released a detailed report outlining consumer fireworks' destruction across the U.S.

Injuries: In 2004, five out of six (85 percent) of the 9,600 fireworks injuries reported to emergency departments involved fireworks that federal regulations permit consumers to use. Total injuries were up from 9,300 in 2003. More than two-fifths (42 percent) of the 2004 fireworks injuries in emergency

rooms were to the head, and more than half (53 percent) were to the extremities. About 21 percent of injuries involved the eyes. Nearly two-thirds (62 percent) of all injuries were burns.

Health and safety advocates urge consumers to stop use of fireworks

As in most years, the majority of victims of fireworks injuries in 2004 were under age 20. The highest injury rates were for children aged five to nine, only slightly higher than the rates for children aged 10 to 14 and individuals aged 15 to 19. The rates for children age four and younger and for young adults aged 20 to 24 were 50 percent higher than the average rate for all ages. Males accounted for three-fourths (75 percent) of all reported fireworks injuries.

Fires: In 2003, the latest year for which national fireworks-related fire statistics are available, fire departments responded to an estimated 2,300 structure and vehicle fires started by fireworks.

Each year, most fireworks-related fires begin in outdoor brush or refuse, but most of the loss occurs in fires with structures involved. These fires can start with outdoor use of fireworks, as when a bottle rocket, launched outside, lands on a roof or other location not easily accessed, where it ignites combustibles before anyone can retrieve it.

Fires started by fireworks caused \$58 million in property damage to structures and vehicles in 2003.

Laws: There are currently only five states that ban all consumer fireworks. They are: Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island.

Because of the dangers of fireworks, members of the Alliance are urging Americans to attend professional fireworks displays this July Fourth season. The Alliance includes NFPA, and the AAP, along with the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Ophthalmology, American Association for Hand Surgery, American Association of Public Health Physicians, American Burn Association, American College of Emergency Physicians, American Society of Plastic Surgeons, Emergency Nurses Association, Fire Department Safety Officers Association, International Association of Arson Investigators, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, International Fire Marshals Association, Metropolitan Fire Chiefs, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National Association of School Nurses, National Association of State Fire Marshals, National Volunteer Fire Council, Prevent Blindness America

NFPA has been a worldwide leader in providing fire, electrical, building, and life safety to the public since 1896. The mission of the international nonprofit organization is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training, and education. Visit NFPA's Web site at www.nfpa.org.

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