

PRACTICE FIREWORKS SAFETY WHILE CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE DAY

The Wisconsin Optometric Association's member doctors urge citizens to protect their eyesight this 4th of July

MADISON, WI – The Fourth of July is a widely celebrated holiday nationwide, and a substantial part of many Fourth of July celebrations both leading up to and during the holiday is the novelty and fun of fireworks. As we celebrate this national holiday in honor of our nation's independence, however, we must not forget the danger that fireworks may pose to our eyes and to our vision. During this year's Fourth of July holiday celebrations, the member doctors of the Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) urge all citizens to exercise caution and safety when enjoying the spectacle of using all types of fireworks.

Outside of injuries to the hands and fingers, eye injuries are among the most common injuries which result from the improper use of fireworks. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC - <http://www.cpsc.gov/>), an estimated 9,600 fireworks-related injuries were treated in 2011. In a study conducted by CPSC staff of fireworks injuries from June 17-July 17, 2011, injuries to the eye were the second most common fireworks-related injuries as measured, accounting for nearly 1 in 5 cases. While fireworks-related injuries typically result in burns on other parts of the body, contusions, lacerations, and lodged foreign bodies are common in terms of fireworks damage done to the eye.

Of concern in this study are results showing that children and young adults under 20 years of age accounted for over 30 percent of all estimated injuries caused by fireworks, and over 1 in 4 children under the age of 15 suffered fireworks-related injuries in this time period. Topping the list of injury causes were sparklers, a favorite among children and generally thought to be reasonably safe in the minds of many parents and adults. The young, who tend to be especially attracted to the spectacle of using fireworks, are suffering the greatest negative impact as a result. In terms of gender, males are overwhelmingly impacted, comprising 68% of fireworks-related injury occurrences.

"As adults and parents, we must take the reins in promoting the safe use of fireworks to everyone within our circle of family and friends," advises current WOA President and Milwaukee and Madison area optometrist Dr. Kellye Knueppel. "As an eye doctor, I have seen firsthand the devastating results of fireworks-related accidents to the eye. Most of these injuries could have been avoided."

The purchase and use without a permit of some consumer fireworks is legal in Wisconsin. However, the WOA reminds all citizens that no private use of fireworks is completely without risk, and therefore, urges citizens to attend fireworks displays conducted by professionals. If you do choose to use fireworks this Fourth of July, please follow common sense safety guidelines; provide adult supervision to older children at all times, instruct children to leave the area immediately if their friends are using fireworks without adult supervision, do not allow young children to play with or ignite fireworks, never shoot off fireworks in metal or glass containers as these materials can explode and release shrapnel, never try to re-light or pick up fireworks that have not ignited fully, and always keep a bucket of water on hand in case of a malfunction or fire.

If an accident does occur, minimize damage to the eye and help potentially save a person's sight by following these guidelines:

- Seek medical attention immediately, even for seemingly mild injuries. "Mildly" damaged areas can worsen and end in serious vision loss or even blindness.
- Shield the eye from pressure. Tape or secure the bottom of a foam cup, milk carton or similar shield against the brow, cheek, and bridge of the nose.
- Do NOT rub the eye or apply pressure. If any eye tissue is torn, rubbing might cause more serious damage.
- Do NOT attempt to rinse out the eye. This can be even more damaging than rubbing.
- Do NOT give aspirin/ibuprofen (or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) to try to reduce the pain. These medications thin the blood and might increase bleeding.
- Do NOT apply ointment or any medication without consulting a licensed eye doctor.

About the Wisconsin Optometric Association

The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at www.woa-eyes.org.