
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



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Safety First when Using Fireworks this Fourth of July

GRAND RAPIDS – Independence Day - the Fourth of July - is approaching fast! Many families are thinking about fireworks. While fireworks can fill the night sky with beauty, they can also be very harmful. The Kent County Health Department urges you to think safety first when you are near fireworks.

In 2012, the City of Grand Rapids Fire Department alone responded to 28 fires caused by fireworks. Those fires caused more than \$100,000 in damage. In Kentwood, investigators ruled that fireworks caused a fire at St. Mary Magdalen Church. The cost to replace the church was estimated at \$7.7 million, and it took nearly two years to rebuild. Someone found guilty for causing a fire that damages property or injures a person in Michigan faces up to 15 years in prison, and fines of up to \$10,000. In 2011, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimated that 17,800 fires in the U.S. were caused by fireworks, leading to eight deaths, 40 injuries and about \$32 million in damages. The NFPA also estimates that 8,700 U.S. hospital emergency room visits were due to firework-related injuries.

“The safest way for you and your family to enjoy fireworks is by attending one of the many public firework displays put on by trained professionals,” says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “Do not allow children to play with fireworks. They should be lit by adults and handled with extreme caution.” Even sparklers can burn at temperatures of up to 2,000 degrees, which is hot enough to melt some metals.

Never set fireworks off in a house or garage, near trees, near electrical wires, or in areas with anything overhead. Fireworks can hit these areas and cause serious damage. Keep a fire extinguisher or a bucket of water nearby in case of emergency. Never pick up “duds” (fireworks that didn’t discharge) or ones that appear to be done. Douse them with water to extinguish them before picking them up, as they could still be active.

While the State of Michigan laws regarding the sale of fireworks changed in 2011, many communities have specific regulations regarding when and where they can be used. Check with your local municipality to see if there are specific days and/or hours when certain fireworks can be discharged. Find out if your local fire department has issued a ‘burn ban,’ prohibiting burning certain things due to weather. Burn bans are often put in place during dry weather, and can limit firework use. The Kent County Health Department hopes that these tips will keep you and your family safe this Fourth of July!

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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