

Big Bang Theory

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Peterborough Fire/Rescue

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Here we are in the year 2003, once again celebrating the independence of our great nation and of our individual liberties. And how do we traditionally mark this occasion? By blanketing the skies with a modern version of a concoction discovered approximately two thousand years ago by Chinese domestic servant. That's right. Fireworks have been around for centuries and are thought to have originated in a Chinese kitchen where three common cooking ingredients were combined and accidentally ignited, resulting in a colorful flame. The servant, shocked by the phenomenon, experimented further with the mixture by burning it in the hollow of an enclosed bamboo shoot, which then produced a deafening bang. Slowly through the years, a theory took root that these loud, colorful explosions were the ideal way to chase away evil spirits, and to celebrate eclipses of the moon and victories in battle.

Today, fireworks are used to commemorate grand occasions like the fast approaching Independence Day celebrations. Those who purchase fireworks for home parties should be aware that even legal fireworks can be extremely dangerous, so always buy from a reputable seller and read and follow all label instructions. According to State Fire Investigator and Peterborough Firefighter Lt. Keith Rodenhiser, "Consumer fireworks are classified as 'Class C Fireworks' and in the state of New Hampshire, there is a recognized list of 'Permissible Class C Fireworks'. If the firework is not on the list, it is illegal to buy or possess." Lt. Rodenhiser advises that local rules about fireworks vary GREATLY from town to town with some towns having banned them altogether. "Each person is responsible for checking with the local Fire Department or Police Department before purchasing or using any fireworks at a given location."

It goes without saying, children should never be given fireworks. A responsible adult wearing protective eye wear should be the only individual to light fireworks and when doing so, should never have any part of the body over the firework. Every year, approximately 11,000 individuals in the United States are severely injured by not following proper safety procedures and 90% of those injuries are to the hands and face.

Prohibit lit cigarettes, cigars, pipes or open flames within ten feet of the firework display. Fireworks should be ignited outdoors in a designated area away from spectators, buildings or dry ground, and water should be available either in a bucket or through the use of a garden hose.

Never discharge fireworks from metal or glass containers as the risk of shattering and projecting fragments is high. Light only one at a time, move away quickly and keep a safe distance away. Occasionally there will be a "dud". Do not attempt to re-light it, rather, wait 15 to 20 minutes and then soak it in a bucket of water. Always aim fireworks away from spectators and never use them in the presence of pets. Pets have very sensitive ears, and these loud, flashy explosions can actually cause them great distress. Dispose of used fireworks by first soaking them in water and then placing them in an outdoor, metal trashcan.

If you are attending a large fireworks show this summer, you can do the following to help promote safety for yourself and those around you. Keep your personal fireworks at home as setting them off in a large crowd is unsettling, not to mention dangerous. Even those dazzling sparklers that look so cute in a child's hand can burn at 1000 degrees, rendering them hazardous to anyone who accidentally comes into contact with the burning end. Respect all safety barriers since though it is a rarity, it is still possible that a firework component might fall to the ground without exploding. Do not investigate it. Move away from the area and alert a firefighter or police officer. In conjunction with pyrotechnic safety specialists, local law enforcement and Fire/Rescue personnel will be present to promote safety so that all spectators can enjoy an evening without mishap or unwelcome surprises.

About surprises... can you imagine the expression on that Chinese servant's face when he produced the biggest bang of his life? Isn't it ironic that two thousand years later, and half way around the world, a modernized version of his gaffe would be used for celebrations of 'independence'?

Peterborough Fire/Rescue welcomes the public to call them at 1-603-924-8090 with any safety concerns and also invites you to visit their website at (www.firerescue.us). Emergencies, call 911.