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For more information:

Betsy van Die

1-888-331-2020 ext, 322

FIREWORKS TIED TO 8,800 INJURIES TREATED IN 2002 HELP PREVENT VISION LOSS BY PLAYING IT SAFE ON THE FOURTH

Schaumburg, Ill – There is only one thing certain about fireworks – they blind. Statistics show that in 2002, there were an estimated 8,800 injuries related to fireworks treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms, many of which caused severe eye injuries. In fact, eyes were the second most commonly injured part of the body, with an estimated 1,200 injuries.

According to Prevent Blindness America (PBA), bottle rockets are the single greatest cause of eye injuries requiring hospitalization. Their flight path is erratic, their fuses are non-standard and their explosive power is enough to turn a “launch site” bottle or can into shrapnel. “While most people recover from their injuries, many permanently lose their sight, some suffer terrible burns, and a few have their lives needlessly wiped out through a custom that has unfortunately become synonymous with American patriotism, but is unbelievably dangerous,” stated Daniel D. Garrett, PBA spokesperson.

If you are not convinced that fireworks are dangerous, consider these eye-opening facts:

- A 21-year-old college student had emergency eye surgery after an acquaintance threw five bottle rockets into a crowd of young people enjoying Fourth of July festivities. One bottle rocket exploded an inch from her eye, causing severe damage to her macula (the center part of the eye), burns to the retina, and laceration of the eyelid. Vision in her left eye went from 20/20 to 20/200, but has since deteriorated to 20/400. She now has a cataract and is at increased risk of developing glaucoma.
- A 12-year-old boy had a firecracker thrown at him. He suffered damage to his retina and pupil that required surgery. The prognosis is that he will probably not regain normal vision in that eye.
- A 44-year-old man was bending over a launching tube to relight a firework—it ignited, hitting and lacerating his left eye. He underwent surgery to have the eye removed.
- A 3-year-old girl sustained permanent damage to her iris when a firecracker hit a cement wall, throwing cement chips into her eye.

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- A 33-year-old man was setting off mortar-type fireworks in his backyard. As he leaned over the plastic tubing and lit the fuse, the firework exploded, striking him in the face. He died from head injuries.
- A 10-year-old boy was at a drive-in movie theater watching a professional fireworks display. A group of kids were playing with fireworks and one exploded in the boy's left eye. The eye could not be saved and the boy has permanent facial scars and an artificial left eye.

PBA has these tips to help prevent fireworks-related injuries:

- Do not purchase, use or store fireworks of any type;
- Be aware that even sparklers are dangerous – they burn up to 1800 degrees Fahrenheit and cause one third of injuries in children 5 and younger;
- Protect yourself, your family, and your friends by avoiding fireworks;
- Attend only authorized public fireworks displays, but be aware that even professional displays can be dangerous;
- Support legislation that restricts the importation, general sale, and indiscriminate usage of fireworks by children and adults.

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, 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 on fireworks safety, to receive a free brochure, or to make a contribution to the sight-saving fund, call 1-800-331-2020 or visit us on the web at www.preventblindness.org.