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## **FIREWORK ACCIDENTS CONTINUE TO SEND AMERICANS TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM**

### ***National Non-Profit Group Urges Americans to Celebrate Fourth of July Safely by Not Using Fireworks***

**CHICAGO (May 26, 2006)** – Many Americans are already making plans on how to spend the upcoming Independence Day weekend. But, no one plans to spend it in the emergency room of their local hospital. Yet, that's what 6,600 people did in 2004 due to accidents caused by fireworks during the Fourth of July holiday weekend, according to the latest data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. There were 9,600 firework-related injuries for the entire year, an increase of 300 injuries from 2003.

Sadly, many of those injured were children. In fact, 40 percent of all fireworks injuries are to those aged 15 and younger. Most injuries are to the hands and fingers, but 1,400 were to the eyes, including contusions and lacerations, debris in the eye and burns. Eye injuries can take a very long time to heal, and can result in permanent vision loss.

"We can't stress enough how dangerous fireworks are, especially to children," said Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America. "No one ever intends to get hurt while playing with them, but they really are accidents just waiting to happen!"

Firecrackers and rockets are unpredictable. Some explode prematurely and rockets can take different flight paths than expected. Tragically, a 4-year-old girl died when someone lit an aerial shell device 150 feet away from her. She was struck in the face by a piece of shrapnel and passed away two days later.

Even devices considered to be "safe and sane" fireworks are dangerous. In 2004, there were 300 children under the age of 5 that were hurt by sparklers.

"No one would dream of handing a torch burning at 1,800 degrees to a child, but that essentially is what a sparkler is," added Garrett. "That's hot enough to melt gold!"

Prevent Blindness America, the nation's oldest eye health and safety organization, urges everyone to leave the fireworks to the professionals this year. Many communities offer spectacular displays to the public, free of charge. The group also offers a free brochure, "Safe Summer Celebrations" with creative ideas on how to celebrate the holiday without fireworks.

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Laws allowing the purchase of fireworks by consumers vary from state to state and sometimes by county. According to the American Pyrotechnics Association there are only five states that ban all consumer sales: Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island. Some states allow limited sales of particular types of fireworks, such as Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Ohio and Vermont. All other states, including Washington, D.C., allow the purchase of some or all types of fireworks.

If someone's eye is injured in a fireworks accident, do the following:

If there are specks in the eye,

- DO NOT rub the eye.
- Lift the upper eyelid outward and down over the lower lid;
- Try to let tears wash out specks or particles;
- If the speck doesn't wash out, keep the eye closed, bandage tightly and see a doctor or go to the emergency room.

If the eye or eyelid is cut or punctured,

- bandage tightly and see a doctor or go to the emergency room immediately.
- DO NOT wash out the eye with water.
- DO NOT try to remove an object stuck in the eye.

For a free copy of the Safe Summer Celebrations brochure or more tips on fireworks safety, call 1-800-331-2020 or log onto [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org).

### **About Prevent Blindness America**

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, 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](http://www.preventblindness.org).

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