

Fourth of July Fire Safety



Two hundred and thirty-two years ago on July 4, members from the second continental congress met in Philadelphia to adopt the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. This date, better known as Independence Day would grow to become one of America's biggest secular holidays.

Over the years, Americans have celebrated Independence Day with fireworks, historical reenactments, and family gatherings, such as cookouts. While each of these activities are a great way to observe the famous holiday, the activities should be carried out with great caution since the discharge of fireworks and the use of grills pose serious fire hazards.

"Celebrating the Fourth of July can be fun, as well as dangerous," said W.G. Billy Shelton, Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. "The improper handling of fireworks along with careless grilling practices can injure people and damage property. However, all of this can be avoided if citizens think "fire safety" and take special precautions during celebration activities."

To ensure all Virginians enjoy an injury-free, fire safe Fourth of July, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs urges all citizens to consider the following:

Fireworks Safety

- Did you know some fireworks are illegal? Before purchasing fireworks check with your local fire marshal's office to determine what fireworks are permissible in your locality.
- Purchase fireworks from licensed/permitted fireworks stands.
- Never light fireworks indoors or near dry grass.
- Always have a bucket of water and/or a fire extinguisher nearby. Know how to properly operate the fire extinguisher.
- Do not wear loose clothing while using fireworks.
- Stand several feet away from lighted fireworks. If fireworks do not go off, do not stand over them to investigate; douse them with water and carefully dispose of them.
- Always read the directions and warning labels on fireworks. If the fireworks are not marked with the contents, directions, and warning labels, do not light them.
- Supervise children around fireworks at all times.
- If not handled properly, fireworks can cause burn and eye injuries in children and adults. The best way to enjoy fireworks is to visit public fireworks displays put on by professionals who know how to safely handle fireworks.

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Grilling Safety

- Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings and out from under eaves and branches.
- Place the grill at a safe distance from lawn games, play areas and foot traffic.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill area: declare a three-foot "safe zone" around the grill.
- Use long-handled grilling tools to have plenty of clearance from heat and flames.
- Propane and charcoal grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors, or in any enclosed spaces, such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and the risk of exposing occupants to toxic gases and potential asphyxiation.

Charcoal

- Use the proper starter fluid and store it out of reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have already been ignited.
- Never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid.

Propane

- Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturers' instructions on how to set up the grill and maintain it.
- Never store propane cylinders in buildings or garages.
- If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call the fire department. Do not attempt to move the grill.

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