

SHROPSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

BONFIRES: PUBLIC DISPLAYS

This guidance note is designed to offer advice and guidance to individuals or organisations who are involved in public bonfire and fireworks displays. The advice contained in this note is a digest of the information contained in guidance documents issued by the Department for Trade and Industry and National Community Fire Safety Centre set up under the direction of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

This guidance is intended for organisers of bonfires and firework displays that are **not** being undertaken by professional display organisers.

If a professional contractor is engaged to provide a firework display, they should comply with the guidance set out in the Health & Safety Executive's publication **HSG123** – '*Working together on firework displays*'. It is further recommended that any person employing the services of a professional display company, consider the guidance given in this document, and seek assurance that the company are properly authorised and/or certificated to carry out the display.

Further details can be found at www.hse.gov.uk

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND SAFETY ADVICE

Make one person responsible for the bonfire, and allow only that person and designated helpers into the bonfire area. Do not use petrol or paraffin to light the fire. A safer way to light it is to use paper and solid firelighters in two or three places to ensure an even burn. Do not burn dangerous rubbish such as foam-filled furniture, rubber, aerosols, tins of paint, pressurised gas cylinders, tyres or bottles. Materials producing light ash, which could blow about, such as corrugated cardboard, are unsuitable for burning.

Before lighting the fire, check its construction carefully to make sure that it is stable, and that there are no children or animals inside. The people looking after the bonfire are advised not to wear lightweight clothing which could ignite relatively easily. They are recommended to wear a substantial outer garment of wool or other material of low flammability and strong boots or shoes. They need to know what to do in the event of a burn injury or a person's clothing catching fire, and also have a fire blanket ready in the bonfire area.

After the display, ensure that the bonfire is completely extinguished and keep spectators out of the bonfire area until this has been done.

The following requirements are important for all aspects of the display and need to be considered in assessing each activity:

- a. What are the hazards?
- b. Who might be harmed, and how?
- c. How likely is it that somebody will be harmed?
- d. Are existing precautions adequate or should more be done?
- e. What further action is necessary to control the risks, which are found not to be adequately controlled?

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A PUBLIC DISPLAY BONFIRE

1. Maybe located anywhere provided it is:

- a. At least 18 metres from other areas; buildings, roads, railways and public rights of way. At least 25 metres if firework display is included.
- b. A safe distance from flammable or otherwise dangerous materials (eg. Petrol, fuel oil, liquefied petroleum gas) and overhead electric power lines.
- c. Downwind of spectators
- d. Of manageable size, not normally more than 6 metres in height so that it collapses inwards.

2. Ensure site is free of dry, cut grass and other readily combustible materials.

- a. Consider damping down surrounding area prior to lighting bonfire during periods of dry weather.
- b. If fireworks are included allow at least 50m x 20m for a firing area. Beyond this is a dropping zone of 100m x 50m which will be required for spent fireworks.
- c. Spectators to be kept away from the firing area and dropping zone.

3. Authorities to contact prior to the event.

- a. **Police:** The Police should be contacted as soon as possible, informing them of the location of the display site and its layout, including all entrances and exits. The police's main interests are crowd control, public order, emergency access and local traffic management and parking. It is advisable to act on any recommendations they may make.
- b. **Fire Service:** Contact the Fire Service at least 28 days before the event. They require the following information.
 - Date and times of the display, including times the bonfire will be lit and extinguished.
 - Duration and times of the firework display.
 - Name and telephone contact of the person responsible for organising and safety at the display.

- How emergency services will be called.
- Access for emergency vehicles.
- Marshalling of spectators and traffic in emergency conditions, and arrangements of spectator's enclosures.
- Local fire fighting arrangements.
- Buildings and other features nearby which could be affected by fire.

These details should be forwarded **in writing** to:

Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
Fire Control
St Michael's Street,
Shrewsbury
SY1 2HJ

- c. **Local Authority.** You may need to contact the local authority under entertainment's and related legislation. Trading Standards department if fireworks to be stored.
- d. **Neighbouring Landowners or users.** Especially livestock and pet holders.

4. Provision of site facilities.

- a. Prevent access of spectators to the bonfire area by some suitable form of physical barrier. A distance of 1½ times the height of the bonfire should be sufficient. In strong winds this distance should be increased.
- b. Adequate firefighting facilities: Equipment for putting out small fires to include fire extinguishers, buckets of water, fire blankets, etc. available throughout the display site. An adequate number of stewards who know how to use this equipment should be present throughout the event.
- c. Provide at least two spectator exits from the site which are large enough, spaced well apart, clearly marked, kept free from obstruction and well lit.
- d. Keep the agreed emergency service routes into the site clear of obstructions and readily accessible at all times.
- e. A small public address system or loudspeaker.
- f. Provide suitable litter receptacles throughout the spectator area.
- g. Car-park area should be preferably well away from the display site and upwind of it. Do not allow parking anywhere else. The parking area should be well sign posted, with vehicle and pedestrian access routes to and from the parking area totally segregated from each other. Where appropriate, supervise parking to prevent obstruction of emergency access routes.
- h. Locate any bar selling alcohol well away from the display site and do not allow drink to be taken away from the bar area.

5. Crowd Safety

- a. Provide an adequate number of stewards responsible for crowd safety, 1 per 250 persons present. Make them easily identifiable, for example, fluorescent jackets. Instruct them to be on constant watch of emergencies.
- b. Control entry to spectator area to avoid overcrowding.
- c. Do not admit spectators to the display with their own fireworks. Proper notices of these restrictions should be posted at all entrances.
- d. Make every effort to start the display on time. Crowd control becomes more difficult the longer the people are kept waiting.

6. What to do if something goes wrong.

An emergency plan should be drawn to deal with each emergency or contingency.

Ask the questions “What actions will be taken?” and “Who will take that action?”

7. Bonfire out of control or fire started by firework debris etc.

If you cannot deal with the fire immediately using first-aid firefighting equipment, call Fire Brigade without delay. You may need to move spectators to a safe place away from the site of the fire, but ensure that a clear access route for fire appliances are maintained at all times.

8. Disorderly behaviour by spectators.

If trouble seems to be developing think about summoning the police before attempting to deal with the matter yourselves.

Advice is freely available on these and any other matters relating to fire safety from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, St. Michael’s Street, SHREWSBURY, SY1 2HJ. Telephone (01743) 260260.