

Bonfire and firework displays



Public firework displays are enjoyable and spectacular events. However, organisers need to ensure they are safe occasions too.

In many instances, there is no reason why you should not light a fireworks display yourself. However, for larger displays, or those involving more sophisticated pyrotechnics, you may want to consider using the services of a professional firework display operator.

Legal requirements

If you are an employer hosting a firework display, you must comply with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. Other, more specific health and safety regulations may also be relevant depending upon the nature of the event you intend to hold.

Generally, you will need to ensure that the event is properly managed so that people remain safe. You may need to:

- complete risk assessments to identify the precautions you need to take
- implement those precautions, providing information and training for any employees and volunteers on what they need to do
- document your arrangements and responsibilities for hosting events, perhaps as part of your health and safety policy
- keep records of what you have done.

Even if you are not an employer, you may still have to comply with certain aspects of the Act or with other related law. For example, if you control non-domestic premises. Here, you may need to make sure that premises are safe during any event. Beyond this, you also need to meet your common-law duty of care, ensuring that any event does not cause injury to another because you have acted negligently.

Moving away from health and safety, some events may require a license from your local authority. Further advice and guidance is available from:

- your local council - www.gov.uk/apply-hold-street-party
- the Department of Culture, Media and Sport - www.gov.uk/guidance/entertainment-licensing-changes-under-the-live-music-act
- the Scottish Government - www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice.

Making a start

- Start planning as early as possible taking account of the number of anticipated spectators; who will be responsible for setting off the fireworks and if there will be a bonfire.
- Ensure that the display site will be large and safe enough to accommodate the number of spectators; the fireworks to be used; any changes in wind direction or strength; and the bonfire if you plan to have one.
- Only make the final selection of a site after you (and the display operator if appointed) have inspected it in daylight to assess its suitability and check for obstructions, e.g. trees, adjoining buildings; overhead power lines etc.
- Decide who you will need to contact before the display, and keep in touch with, as your plans develop e.g. the police, fire service and others depending upon your circumstances (e.g. the local authority; local hospitals, care homes, insurers etc.).
- Identify and provide adequate site facilities including spectator exits; emergency service routes; physical barriers; fire-fighting facilities; stewards; public address equipment; first-aid facilities (including qualified first-aiders); litter receptacles; car-parking areas etc.
- Draw up an emergency/contingency plan detailing the arrangements for dealing with having to stop the display early or cancelling it due to adverse weather conditions; accidents; a bonfire that becomes out of control; a fire started by firework debris; spectators in unsafe areas or their unruly behaviour; public announcements; communication between the display operator and those with responsibility in the event of an emergency.
- Make adequate arrangements for safely clearing up after the display, including keeping danger areas free of spectators until they are safe; checking the site for partly spent fireworks and other hazardous remains; checking the site at first light to make sure it is safe etc.

If using a display operator

- Ensure that they are competent by asking for details about what training and experience they have; their insurance cover; and references etc.
- Once appointed, agree (and document) your respective areas of responsibility with them, particularly those for the safe transport and storage of fireworks before the display.

If setting the fireworks off yourself

- Look after the fireworks properly before the display, storing them in their packaging in a secure, cool, dry place where there are no naked flames or other sources of ignition and no highly flammable substances.
- Transport them safely on the day of the display.
- Store them safely at the display site before use e.g. in a building or a closed metal or wooden container located in an area of the site not accessible to the public.
- Set them up in accordance with the detailed instructions provided by the manufacturer or supplier, in a timely manner and in the designated firing area.
- Ensure there are an adequate number of competent firers, preparing a firing plan if there are two or more of them.

- Only allow firers in the firing area, checking that they are wearing suitable clothing.
- Provide firers with a suitable means of communication and other necessary equipment (e.g. goggles, gloves, hearing protection, electric torch, whistle etc.).
- Set the fireworks off as recommended by the manufacturers or suppliers instructions.
- Ensure that if any fireworks fail to go off properly they are dealt with safely.

If you plan to light a bonfire

- Make one person responsible for it, from early planning to final clearing up.
- Correctly site the fire, locating it a safe distance from other areas, buildings, roads, railways and public rights of way; a safe distance from flammable or otherwise dangerous materials (e.g. petrol, fuel oil, liquefied petroleum gas), overhead electric power lines; and downwind of spectators.
- Prohibit the burning of dangerous rubbish (e.g. aerosols, rubber, paint tins, pressurised gas cylinders or foam-filled furniture etc.). Materials producing light ash which could blow about, such as corrugated cardboard, are unsuitable for burning.
- Remove rubbish and other combustibles from the bonfire area in advance.
- Only allow the responsible person and designated helpers into the bonfire area. They should wear suitable clothing and know what to do in the event of an emergency.
- Immediately before lighting, check that the fire is stable and that there are no children or animals hidden inside.
- Ensure there is a safe procedure for lighting the fire and those responsible know not to use flammable liquids (e.g. paraffin, petrol) to get it going or put fireworks on to it, even if they're dud.

Want to know more?

Other useful health and safety information is available on our [website](#).

More detailed guidance on planning a firework display is available from the Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk.

General guidance and resources for managing events is also available at www.hse.gov.uk/event-safety/ and from RoSPA at <http://www.rospace.com/>.

Helpful guidance aimed at volunteers organising community events is provided by the Cabinet Office in their 'Can Do' Guide. This is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events

Note: if you are in Ireland, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man, then regional variations might apply. In this instance, you should check the guidance provided.

Need to contact us?

For further advice Ecclesiastical customers can call our risk advice line on **0345 600 7531** (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, excluding bank holidays) or email us at risk.advice@ecclesiastical.com and one of our experts will call you back within 24 hours.

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