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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Be safe this July 4

The Fourth of July is approaching fast. Independence Day is a time to celebrate, reflect on freedom and of course enjoy fireworks.

Federal, state and local laws and ordinances restrict - and often prohibit - the use of fireworks.

Despite these limitations, hospitals treat thousands of firework-related injuries every year, and fire departments respond to numerous fires related to hot sparks and falling debris.

Fireworks are explosive and extremely hot. Mishandling them can have life-altering consequences.

The Illinois Insurance Association and its member companies urge families to leave fireworks displays to professionals. Residents resolved to proceed with their own display should keep the following tips in mind:

- Be familiar with federal, state and local laws related to firework displays.
- Only adults should

use fireworks. Firecrackers, reloadable shells, roman candles, bottle rockets and novelties may seem harmless, but they cause 41% of fire-

work-related injuries according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Another 19% are related to sparklers, which can burn at temperatures as high as 1200 to 2000 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Set off fireworks outside, in a clear, flat, open area clear of combustible debris.

- Keep a water bucket or garden hose near the light-off area.

- Use water to extinguish deployed fireworks and then place them in a metal trash can. Do not re-light duds. Soak the nonfunctioning firework in a water bucket before throwing it away.

The Illinois Insurance Association reminds residents to be cautious around fireworks in the coming weeks. Have a safe and happy holiday!

- Kevin J. Martin, Executive Director, Illinois Insurance Association