

CELEBRATING WITH FIREWORKS IS A CANADIAN TRADITION

By **Melanie Sutherland**

In Canada, our celebrations of national and local pride, history, tradition and culture are often celebrated by a brilliant and beautiful display of fireworks – a tradition that unites families, friends and communities. Whether it's Canada Day, Victoria Day, New Year's Eve, Halloween, Lunar New Year, Diwali, or St. Jean-Baptiste Day, or simply a summer BBQ or birthday celebration, Canadians often use family fireworks as a safe and fun way to commemorate.

Thousands of Canadians enjoy this long-standing tradition of using fireworks.

Whether for sale year round or just at certain times of the year, most Canadians enjoy the use of fireworks without incident, yet some municipalities are banning them in order to deal with isolated issues that, for the most part, have no bearing on the safe use of authorized family fireworks.

If the objective is to eliminate potential issues that may arise with the improper use of fireworks, such as injury or property damage, then efforts should be made to tackle the real problem; the improper use and sale of

unauthorized fireworks in Canada.

Restricting access to unauthorized fireworks and ensuring safe compliance should be the main focus.

Given the number of Canadians who clearly enjoy a safe and regulated fireworks display, as evidenced during celebratory events, creating regulations intended to restrict or prohibit serves only to punish those law-abiding citizens. As first responders and regulatory bodies, you will also likely find great difficulty preventing the purchase and unregulated use of unauthorized fireworks that will no doubt follow.

In Canada, the federal government regulates the use, sale and storage of fireworks. Fireworks are put through rigorous product testing before they can be sold and used. Federally approved family fireworks are safe when used according to guidelines and, as with all flammable products; caution must be taken when handling them.

Fireworks do not cause injury. The misuse and sale of illegal fireworks causes injury.

The notion of personal responsibility must not be abdicated in favour of legislation that infringes upon our personal rights. Everyone must take responsibility to ensure that the appropriate measures are taken when selling, storing and discharging fireworks.

Common sense tells us not to put a burning candle in the hands of a child. We don't need to make candles illegal to ensure a child won't be harmed by a burning candle even though the probability of injury from a candle is 115 times more likely than that of fireworks.

We need to focus on unauthorized products that find their way into the hands of consumers.

Many fireworks products are not authorized for use in Canada because they are dangerous. They are explosives,



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disguised as fireworks. A search for fireworks on online classified ad companies like Kijiji demonstrates just how easy it is to purchase these products. These unauthorized vendors do not abide by the law and yet they are not held accountable. The availability of authorized products locally will reduce the need for consumers to access product online.

Canada shares a large border with the United States so it is unrealistic to think that a ban of fireworks in any given jurisdiction will eliminate use. Will it reduce the overall use of family fireworks? Perhaps. Will it reduce the number of accidents associated with fireworks? Not likely. By banning fireworks, we are actually eliminating the opportunity to educate the consumer regarding proper use.

The City of Toronto adopted a by-law that allows for the year-round sale of fireworks while promoting a public education campaign. As a result, while the use of fireworks continues to rise year after year, the number of incidents associated with fireworks has fallen dramatically. Knowledge is power.

In contrast, the municipality of Abbotsford in BC has banned federally approved fireworks since 2004. This ban has not stopped the use of fireworks as they are still common and widespread in that community and the use of unauthorized fireworks has increased substantially.

In Abbotsford, citizens are now purchasing fireworks and using them quickly and irresponsibly in order to avoid law enforcement, running the risk of purchasing dangerous illegal explosives disguised as fireworks. Once again, the use of fireworks has not been eliminated, but the opportunity for education has been.

Ideally, municipal and provincial governments should work with similar regulations, allowing local jurisdictions the authority to enforce those regulations within their own boundaries. Additional restrictions can be imposed however they must be enforceable. A by-law that is too onerous to abide by or enforce will not achieve the desired results—compliance and safety.

So what can be done? Education is the answer.

In order to address concerns about fireworks, all levels of governments, the industry and consumers alike must work together to better educate people on the safe handling of fireworks. We also need to work together to address the issue of authorized versus unauthorized products; local and federal regulations; and what the consequences can be if safety guidelines and by-laws are not adhered to.

Meaningful discussion through consultation with the industry will result in safer communities based on sound legislation and personal responsibility.

Legislation should be based on fact and detail, not emotion. Approved by-laws should be enforceable by municipalities. The fireworks industry too must be held accountable and comply with federal and any other regulations in effect. And perhaps most importantly, the general public must be made aware of existing legislation and be educated on the safe purchase and use of fireworks. Because safety is of paramount concern to all parties, public education sessions could be offered by local fire stations or city halls in advance of bigger community celebrations. Additional safety brochures can accompany the purchase of authorized fireworks. Signed safety permits may also be an option when making a purchase. These are just a few options we can consider but with your input and expertise, we can go even further.

In order to ensure fireworks will continue to be a special part of celebrations that unite families, friends and communities across Canada, we must all work together to ensure federal regulations are respected through safe, authorized use.

Canadian National Fireworks Association

The CNFA's mission is to promote fair access and safety in the sale and use of fireworks through public education, advocacy with regulators, and member compliance.

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