

# ADVISER

## BE SAFE, NOT SORRY THIS GUY FAWKES NIGHT



Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night is a time of excitement for children and adults alike, when many school and colleges host organised firework and bonfire displays.

These events represent an opportunity to spend time with parents and the school's wider community. However, they also pose significant risks. No one wants what should be an enjoyable family evening to turn into a nightmare. So making sure everything goes off without a hitch boils down to understanding the risks and taking sensible precautions to mitigate them.

### UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

Primarily, there is the risk to health and safety. In 2005 – the last year in which firework accident statistics were collected – the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) found that almost 1,000 people were injured by fireworks<sup>1</sup>. The Royal College of Optometrists, meanwhile, stated that 10 people a year lose their sight because of accidents with fireworks<sup>2</sup>.

Clearly, the danger to life and limb is of the utmost importance, but there are a range of knock-on consequences for event organisers should the worst happen. Liability claims might well follow, as well as health and safety, and even criminal, investigations – all of which offer significant extra incentive, if any were needed, to do everything necessary to avoid accidents.

### TAKE SENSIBLE PRECAUTIONS

Minimising the risks boils down to taking sensible precautions – ensure this process has a proper structure by drafting a written risk assessment for the event. It is also important to inform the Fire Brigade and Police of your plans, sharing relevant risk assessments, and prepare a drill for calling out the emergency services.

Then think about crowd control and crowd safety on the night. Choose a site that is suitable and large enough for your display and bonfire. Make sure there is enough space for fireworks to land well away from spectators, and check for potential hazards like overhead power lines and other obstructions.

On top of that, be sure to select a site with plenty of entrances and exits, put in place measures to keep spectators at least 25 metres from a firework display and arrange for properly trained stewards to be present – at least one per 250 spectators and a minimum of two.

Also, consider the direction of the prevailing wind and what would happen if it were to change – could smoke from your display affect nearby buildings, or limit visibility on nearby roads?

## Did You Know?

That sparklers get five times hotter than cooking oil and a firework “rocket” can reach speeds in excess of 150mph?

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Other actions you should consider, include:

- Carry out a thorough risk assessment to identify hazards to staff, volunteers, spectators, and others involved or attending the event.
- Contact your neighbours – make them aware of the nature, scale, timing, and duration of the event.
- Ensure your bonfire is a manageable size and built at least 50 metres clear of buildings, pylons, trees, and long grass.
- Never use accelerant to light the bonfire, and ensure a water supply is easily available.
- Make sure adequate first-aid facilities can be provided, and give the emergency services details of emergency vehicle access sites. Qualified first-aiders with suitable equipment should attend all organised bonfires and firework displays.
- Put in place plans to control entrances (preferably via a ticketing system), insisting children under 18 are accompanied by an adult. Ensure all fireworks comply with the British Standard (BS-7114), are properly inspected prior to use, and are handled only by designated members of staff or specialist contractors.
- Think about who will operate the display. You can light a display yourself provided it only involves category 1, 2, and 3 fireworks – but professional firework display operators must be engaged if category 4 fireworks are part of the display.
- At the end of the evening, a responsible adult should make sure that the bonfire is safe by raking over the embers and damping them down.

Clearly, a full list of preventative measures is more detailed, and specific risks will vary from school to school. So, invest time in the planning stages to review the latest guidance from organisations such as ROSPA – [www.saferfireworks.com](http://www.saferfireworks.com) – that has further useful information about planning a safe fireworks display. It provides details on UK law, tips for setting up a display, and the firework code.

You may also wish to visit the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website – [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) – it provides a range of health and safety management publications including *Giving Your Own Firework Display: How to Run and Fire it Safely*.

Finally, remember to notify your insurance broker well in advance that you are hosting an event. They will help manage your insurance programme for you and provide further guidance if required.

If you are employing the services of a 3rd party event contractor, you will undoubtedly check that they are competent and experienced in the particular type of event, but it is also essential that you satisfy yourself that they have suitable insurances against public liability risks. Ask to see certificates of insurance, which should evidence liability indemnity limits appropriate to the scale and scope of the activities and associated risks.



## NEED FURTHER HELP?

Whether you are looking for detailed risk advice or just an informal conversation about your insurance needs why not get in touch today?

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i [http://saferfireworks.com/statistics/gb/stats\\_2005.htm](http://saferfireworks.com/statistics/gb/stats_2005.htm)

ii <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/debates/6507958/Should-fireworks-be-banned.html>



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