

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

A publication of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, Concord, NH (603) 271-3710

June 2019

This Independence Day, Be a Patriot Not a Polluter

There is no tradition more American than fireworks on the Fourth of July. Despite the visual spectacle of fireworks, there are pollutants that may be harmful to lakes and groundwater. Fireworks are made of several chemicals used to make the colors, pops and booms that we all enjoy. However, these chemicals often find their way into our drinking water and beloved lakes and ponds. This is not to say that fireworks should not be enjoyed on your favorite patriotic holiday! Here's what you can do to help protect your favorite lake or natural area from firework chemicals:

Celebrate with your community: Instead of having a fireworks display for a few people at home, consider going to your neighborhood or community celebration. Think of it as carpooling for fireworks! Public displays are usually free and just as spectacular, not to mention better for the environment.

Watch where you launch: Unfortunately, chemicals from fireworks can end up in the worst places, including drinking water. The best practice is to avoid using the land near drinking water supplies for launching fireworks when setting them off at home. When launched, the fireworks release environmentally unfriendly substances that show up in our water sources. Runoff from fireworks, including heavy metal and other chemicals, could be harmful to humans or animals. To avoid chemical runoff, avoid launching from pure sand and soil. Sidewalks and roadways that lead to storm drains should be avoided, too!

Avoid 'pier' pressure: Many firework displays are launched from boat docks and beaches for viewing over lakes, ponds and the ocean. That means that after launch, the remaining materials end up in these bodies of water. Debris from multiple displays accumulates quickly and leaves an unsightly mess as well as pollution. If washed into the water, it may become contaminated, which in turn negatively impacts water quality and disrupts aquatic life. Inevitably, the fireworks trash and chemicals will wash into the water, which is bad for both fish and swimmers.

All about angles: Launch fireworks at a steep angle so that maximum height is achieved. This will help prevent fireworks from ending up in the water before they have completely combusted. Sometimes fireworks are found in the water before they have expelled chemicals if they are not launched at a proper position.

Clean up: Rake the launch area and clean up all debris and misfires immediately after the display if possible. This will keep your favorite lake, pond or yard in tip-top shape! There may be non-combusted materials in the water, so make sure to check for those, too.

Disposal of Fireworks (Discharged or not): Do not just throw the spent fireworks in the trash as your local solid waste facility may have specific regulations and procedures for disposing of these materials as a safety precaution. Talk with your transfer station operator or local police on their procedures for properly disposing of them.

For more information, check out the [NHDES fact sheet on fireworks](#).

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