

SHROPSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

FIRE SAFETY ADVICE SHEET

BONFIRES – SITING & SUPERVISION

A GUIDE TO THE SAFE SITING AND SUPERVISION OF BONFIRES

This advice sheet provides advice and guidance on the siting and supervision of bonfires, which are usually associated with firework displays. This guidance is intended for organisers of bonfires that are **not** being undertaken by professional display organisers.

Our Advice Sheet AS10/2007 provides information and guidance on safe and successful firework displays, with additional guidance being available via the Health and Safety Executive's web site at:

www.hse.gov.uk/explosives/fireworks/using.htm

If a professional contractor is engaged to provide a bonfire and firework display, they should comply with the guidance set out in the Health & Safety Executive's publication **HSG123** – 'Working together on firework displays'. It is further recommended that any person employing the services of a professional display company, consider the guidance given in this document, and seek assurance that the company are properly authorised and/or certificated to carry out the display.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND SAFETY ADVICE

Make one person responsible for the bonfire, and allow only that person and designated helpers into the bonfire area. Do not use petrol or paraffin to light the fire. A safer way to light it is to use paper and solid firelighters in two or three places to ensure an even burn. Do not burn dangerous rubbish such as foam-filled furniture, rubber, aerosols, tins of paint, pressurised gas cylinders, tyres or bottles. Materials producing light ash, which could blow about, such as corrugated cardboard, are unsuitable for burning.

Before lighting the fire, check its construction carefully to make sure that it is stable, and that there are no children or animals inside. The people looking after the bonfire are advised not to wear lightweight clothing which could ignite relatively easily. They are recommended to wear a substantial outer garment of wool or other material of low flammability and strong boots or shoes. They need to know what to do in the event of a burn injury or a person's clothing catching fire, and also have a fire blanket ready in the bonfire area.

After the display, ensure that the bonfire is completely extinguished and keep spectators out of the bonfire area until this has been done.

The following requirements are important for all aspects of the display and need to be considered in assessing each activity:

- a. What are the hazards?
- b. Who might be harmed, and how?
- c. How likely is it that somebody will be harmed?
- d. Are existing precautions adequate or should more be done?
- e. What further action is necessary to control the risks, which are found not to be adequately controlled?

SITING AND CONSTRUCTION

- a. Sites should be a minimum of 18 metres from buildings, crops, trees, roads, railways, public rights of way and other combustible items (e.g. petrol, fuel oil, liquefied petroleum gas).
- b. Additional allowance in distance may have to be made depending upon the strength and direction of the wind.
- c. Undergrowth on the site should be cleared, and any grass cut short in the vicinity of the bonfire.
- d. Beware of overhead power cables, telephone lines etc when choosing your site.
- e. Where the public will be involved, the bonfire should be roped off to a minimum distance of 6m or 1½ times the height of the bonfire, whichever is the greater.
- f. Care should be taken in its construction, to ensure, as far as is possible, that it will not fall over once alight, and it should not normally be more than 6 metres in height so that it collapses inwards.

SUPERVISION and SAFETY

- a. The site should be under the supervision of one responsible person, who should have carried out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment using the principles outlined above.
- b. An adequate number of stewards should be appointed (2 for every 500 people or part thereof) all of whom should be clearly recognizable.
- c. Consideration should be given to the provision of third party insurance cover.
- d. Consider damping down surrounding areas prior to lighting your bonfire during periods of dry weather.
- e. If fireworks are included, allow at least 50m x 20m for a firing area. Beyond this is a dropping zone of 100m x 50m which will be required for spent fireworks (see Advice Sheet AS10/2007).
- f. Control entry to spectator areas to avoid overcrowding.
- g. Do not admit spectators to the display with their own fireworks. Proper notices of these restrictions should be posted at all entrances.

- h. Make every effort to start the display on time. Crowd control becomes more difficult the longer the people are kept waiting.

PROVISION OF SITE FACILITIES

- a. Adequate firefighting facilities: Equipment for putting out small fires to include fire extinguishers, buckets of water, fire blankets, etc. available throughout the display site. An adequate number of stewards who know how to use this equipment should be present throughout the event.
- b. Provide at least two spectator exits from the site which are large enough, spaced well apart, clearly marked, kept free from obstruction and well lit.
- c. Keep the agreed emergency service routes into the site clear of obstructions and readily accessible at all times.
- d. A small public address system or loudspeaker.
- e. Provide suitable litter receptacles throughout the spectator area.
- f. Car-park area should be preferably well away from the display site and upwind of it. Do not allow parking anywhere else. The parking area should be well sign posted, with vehicle and pedestrian access routes to and from the parking area totally segregated from each other. Where appropriate, supervise parking to prevent obstruction of emergency access routes.
- g. Locate any bar selling alcohol well away from the display site and do not allow drink to be taken away from the bar area.

AUTHORITIES TO CONTACT PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- a. **Police**: The Police should be contacted as soon as possible, informing them of the location of the display site and its layout, including all entrances and exits. The police's main interests are crowd control, public order, emergency access and local traffic management and parking. It is advisable to act on any recommendations they may make.
- b. **Fire Service**: Contact the Fire Service at least 28 days before the event. They require the following information.
 - Date and times of the display, including times the bonfire will be lit and extinguished.
 - Duration and times of the firework display.
 - Name and telephone contact of the person responsible for organising and safety at the display.
 - How emergency services will be called.
 - Access for emergency vehicles.
 - Marshalling of spectators and traffic in emergency conditions, and arrangements of spectator's enclosures.
 - Local fire fighting arrangements.
 - Buildings and other features nearby which could be affected by fire.

These details should be forwarded **in writing** to:

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service
 Fire Control
 St Michael's Street,
 Shrewsbury
 SY1 2HJ

- c. **Local Authority.** You may need to contact the local authority under Licensing and related legislation. Trading Standards department if fireworks to be stored.
- d. **Neighbouring Landowners or users.** Especially livestock and pet holders.

WHAT TO DO IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

An emergency plan should be drawn up to deal with each emergency or contingency.

Ask the questions "What actions will be taken?" and "Who will take that action?"

1. Bonfire out of control or fire started by firework debris etc.

If you cannot deal with the fire immediately using first-aid firefighting equipment, call Fire Brigade without delay. You may need to move spectators to a safe place away from the site of the fire, but ensure that a clear access route for fire appliances are maintained at all times.

2. Disorderly behaviour by spectators.

If trouble seems to be developing think about summoning the police before attempting to deal with the matter yourselves.

Advice is freely available on these and any other matters relating to fire safety from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service, St. Michael's Street, SHREWSBURY, SY1 2HJ. Telephone (01743) 260260.

For further information on the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 please contact:

- Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service - www.shropshirefire.gov.uk
- Department for Communities and Local government - <http://www.communities.gov.uk>

Or for general fire safety matters, Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service can be reached on **01743 260260** or via our web site at **www.shropshirefire.gov.uk**