



THE CASE FOR REVIEWING FIREWORKS LEGISLATION: THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF FIREWORKS UPON VULNERABLE PEOPLE

ACTION NEEDED: We are calling on the Government to conduct a review of existing fireworks legislation in England and Wales, accounting for their impact on people with PTSD, including veterans, and adults and young people with burns injuries.

Current Fireworks Legislation

- Fireworks can be set off by any adult between 7.00am and 11.00pm every day of the year, except for on Bonfire Night (extended until midnight) and on New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year, (extended until 1am).
- There is no legal requirement for any license or training to set off fireworks. Although it is illegal to set them off on the street or in public places this is seldom adhered to or enforced.
- Fireworks can only be sold to persons aged 18 years or older. No license or training required.
- They can be sold at any time of the year and can be bought online. A retailer does not need a license to sell fireworks between 5th October-10th November (around Bonfire Night), 26th December-31st December (New Years Eve), or on the first day of Chinese New Year and Diwali and the 3 days before it.

People with PTSD:

PTSD can affect anyone who has experienced a traumatic experience. The rate of PTSD in the general UK population is thought to be around 3-5% (around 3,282,000 people).¹

Trauma such as being told you have a life-threatening illness, violent personal assault, childhood abuse, natural disasters, or pregnancy loss can cause physical changes in the brain and leave people with symptoms that can make day-to-day life exhausting, challenging and overwhelming. The unexpected nature of fireworks can cause significant issues for people suffering from PTSD, and seriously increase symptoms and resulting issues:

- Hypervigilance (constantly being on high alert)
- Intense physical reactions to reminders of the event that caused PTSD
- Reduced tolerance to noise (hyperacusis)
- Feeling jumpy and easily startled

Veterans:

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) of surveyed veterans said fireworks have triggered a negative experience for them personally, ranging from feeling jumpy and hypervigilant through to experiencing a full panic attack according to new research by Help for Heroes and Combat Stress.²

The fireworks season can be a distressing time for many veterans. Sudden loud noises, unexpected flashes and the smell of fireworks and bonfires can bring back painful and traumatic memories of combat. The same research showed 74 per cent of veterans surveyed want to see the days and times when fireworks can be set off to be

¹PTSD UK, *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder stats and figures*. <https://www.ptsduk.org/ptsd-stats/>

² New research commissioned by Help for Heroes and Combat Stress: YouGov Poll with representative sample of n:400 veterans (Sept 2023). <https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/about-us/news/our-call-for-tougher-restrictions-on-fireworks/>

restricted further; whilst 67 per cent want a reduction in the overall number of days fireworks can be sold to the public. Combat Stress records a higher rate of distress in veterans accessing our services at this time of year.

Children and adults with burn injuries:

In 2023, NHS burns advice was sought every 21 seconds over Bonfire Night weekend, that's a 27% increase on normal traffic to the advice service.³ Over 550 children under 16 are taken to A&E in the four weeks surrounding bonfire night alone, but by tightening legislation we can prevent more burn injuries.⁴

- Many more boys than girls are injured by fireworks – especially boys aged 12 to 15 years.
- Most injuries happen at private or family displays.
- Most injuries are to the eyes, head or hands – so children will have visible scars for life.
- Rocket, air bomb and sparkler incidents are the most common.
- Sparklers are often seen as a relatively harmless way of allowing very young children to participate in the thrill of fireworks night – THIS IS NOT TRUE – a sparkler can reach temperatures of 20 times the boiling point of water.

Reform in Scotland

In June 2022, the Scottish Parliament passed the [Fireworks and Pyrotechnics Articles \(Scotland\) Act](#). This Act has introduced fireworks licensing in Scotland and specifies that fireworks can only be supplied to, and used by, members of the public only on certain dates (around celebration periods). It also grants local authorities the powers to set-up 'firework control zones'. We believe this could be a model for legislative reform in England and Wales.

Action Needed

We are calling on the Government to conduct a review of existing fireworks legislation, accounting for their impact on people with PTSD including veterans, and adults and young people with burns injuries.

Useful Resources

1. Help for Heroes: 'The Firework Heroes Code'
<https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/resources/news/follow-the-firework-heroes-code/>
2. Combat Stress: 'Five Tips to Help Veterans Affected By Fireworks'
<https://combatstress.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/fireworks-tips>
3. PTSD UK: 'Remember remember... those with PTSD'
<https://www.ptsduk.org/remember-remember-those-with-ptsd/>
4. Dans Fund for Burns: 'Get Help'
<https://dansfundforburns.org/get-help/#useful-links>
5. Children's Burns Trust: 'Fireworks'
<https://cbtrust.org.uk/get-informed/campaigns/fireworks/>

³ NHS England, 'NHS burns advice sought every 21 seconds over Bonfire Night weekend', 3 November 2023.
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/11/nhs-burns-advice-sought-every-21-seconds-over-bonfire-night-weekend/>

⁴ Children's Burns Trust: 'Fireworks'. <https://cbtrust.org.uk/get-informed/campaigns/fireworks/>