

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 Sainte-Jean-Baptiste Day, among others, or simply a summer BBQ or birthday celebration, Canadians often use family fireworks as a safe and fun way to commemorate.

Whether for sale year round or just at certain times of the year, thousands of Canadians enjoy the use of fireworks without incident. Still, some municipalities are banning them in order to deal with issues that, for the most part, have no bearing on legal 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, which is the improper use and illegal sale of fireworks in Canada.

Restricting access to these illegal fireworks and ensuring compliance should be the main focus.

Regulations developed by knee-jerk reactions and based on unsubstantiated emotional responses do not create a safer environment – all they do is create an environment that will allow for the illegal sale of fireworks to flourish. Not only will an over-regulated, impractical system put Canadians at greater risk, it also only serves to punish law-abiding citizens.

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/or 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. Rather, we need to focus on illegal products that find their way into the hands of consumers.

Many fireworks products are banned in Canada because they are dangerous. They are explosives, 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 vendors do not abide by the law and yet they are not held accountable. Their name and phone numbers are

posted on their advertisement. Why is this acceptable? And, if it's not, then why are they not being charged?

Canada shares a large border with the United States and it is foolish to think that a ban of fireworks in any given jurisdiction will eliminate its 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, what is being eliminated is the opportunity to educate the consumer regarding proper use.

In Ontario, Toronto recently 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.

In contrast, the municipality of Abbotsford in B.C. has had a ban on federally-approved fireworks since 2004. This ban has not stopped the use of



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fireworks, as they are still common and widespread in that community, and the use of illegal fireworks has increased substantially. 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.

Local and provincial governments need to be aware of federal regulations and recognize that municipalities have jurisdiction over the need for enforcement. Furthermore, 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.

The Answer: Education and Accountability

So what can be done? In order to address concerns about fireworks, governments, the industry, and consumers alike must work together to better educate people on the “do’s and don’ts” of handling fireworks. We also need to work together to address the issue of legal versus illegal products; local and federal regulations; and what the consequences can be if safety guidelines and by-laws are not adhered to.

In addition, meaningful discussion through consultation with the industry will result in safer communities, based

on sound legislation and personal responsibility.

Regulators should avoid creating legislation based on knee-jerk reactions and/or without all the details and must be prepared to enforce any by-laws approved. 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. Safety is of paramount concern to all parties. 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. **MW**

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