

Home fireworks shows may be facing 'endangered species list'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Enjoy shooting off those Fourth of July fireworks in the back yard while you can.

Pyrotechnics specialist John Conkling says this hallowed family tradition is on America's "list of endangered species" and may be headed for extinction.

"We could have a video game Fourth of July in the not-too-distant future, sitting in our living rooms and watching animated fireworks displays on our television screens," he said.

Conkling, executive director of the American Pyrotechnics Association, blames a "totally irrational campaign" by lobbyists who want to ban all fireworks except for public displays by licensed professionals.

The way things are going, he said, "the prospects are frighteningly real" that families won't be able to celebrate Independence Day by lighting old-fashioned goodies like firecrackers, sky rockets, roman candles, fountains, pinwheels and sparklers.

"If that happens, I'll feel sad that a prohibition was adopted that isn't warranted, that the forces of exaggeration had won, that a 215-year-old American tradition had died and one more individual freedom had perished," he said.

Conkling, 46, is a jovial chemistry professor at Washington College at Chestertown, Md., with a scholarly passion for fireworks. He published the first authoritative textbook on the subject, "The Chemistry of Pyrotechnics," in 1985, and a Conkling article on fireworks appears in the July issue of Scientific American magazine.

He can tell you that charcoal or iron will burn with a brilliant orange, that strontium salts produce striking reds, that barium nitrate gives off a bright green and that copper chloride is best for making blue, the most difficult and elusive color in the fireworks spectrum.

"My hobbies are fishing and the science of pyrotechnics," Conkling said with a laugh. "I'll grow up one of these days."

He was in Washington last week to give holiday safety tips on a media hot line sponsored by the National Council on Fireworks Safety. The council is a public service arm of the \$200-million fireworks industry's trade association, which Conkling runs from an office in his hometown.

Conkling's message is that backyard fireworks are safe if used with a little common sense.

The industry council said fireworks injuries have declined in recent years, from 12,600 in 1986 to 9,700 last year, according to estimates by the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The government has taken the bang out of the Fourth of July in recent years. The Food and Drug Administration outlawed high-powered firecrackers in 1966, and the product safety agency issued strict, industry-backed regulations 10 years later that severely limited the kinds of fireworks that can be sold legally in the United States.

Thirteen states have gone further and banned fireworks of any kind.

Conkling singled out the National Fire Protection Association based in Quincy, Mass., for its campaign to outlaw all fireworks for individuals.

"They hate fireworks," he said.

Spokeswoman Julie Reynolds confirmed that the non-profit NFPA, whose members include fire marshals, insurance companies and sprinkler manufacturers, believe that "fireworks should be left in the hands of licensed professions" and kept out of the hands of amateurs.

"Fireworks are explosives and they are dangerous," Ms. Reynolds said. "Even sparklers can and do cause serious injuries."



With a bang

Kimberlee Ingraham, director of Christian Education and Youth, helps John-Mark Gurney of Eugene sample the wares of the Grace Youth Ministries fireworks stand at the corner of 18th Avenue and Hilyard Street Monday in anticipation of Independence Day festivities.

Photo by Vince Ramirez

Officials fear holiday may spark new wildfires in parched areas

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Infrared cameras zeroed in on the last hot spots at the Santa Barbara fire Monday, and officials warned that July 4 fireworks could touch off a new plague of wildfires in the parched West.

Fire officials warn that northern California, northern Nevada and Idaho are expected to reach the same level of dryness later this summer. Those helped renew calls by many fire officials to ban all fireworks, even the so-called "safe and sane" variety.

"I hate that term 'safe and sane fireworks' because it's a misnomer," said Fountain Valley Fire Chief Richard Jorgensen.

Jorgensen and other Orange County fire chiefs boycotted a fireworks safety news conference two years ago when they learned that manufacturers of legal fireworks were also scheduled to appear.

"First of all, they burn at a temperature over a thousand degrees," Jorgensen said. "We teach kids all year long not to play with fire, then we turn around on the Fourth of July and put them in their hands and tell them it's fun."

Independence Day revelers often show lapses in judgment, like some young Fountain Valley adults caught lobbing fireworks back and forth at each other as they stood on a wood roof, he said.

Officials lowered their acre-burned estimate for the Santa Barbara fire from 4,900 to 4,200, but doubled the damages to \$500 million.

Arsonists were blamed for that fire and others in Southern California's Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego counties that consumed more than 500 dwellings.

Anyone near locations where

the blazes broke out was urged to contact authorities no matter how sketchy their information.

"No matter how insignificant they think it is, when they add it to what we've got it may break the case open," Santa Barbara sheriff's Sgt. Tim Gracey said.

Southern California, southern Colorado, southern Utah, Arizona and New Mexico are severely affected by a four-year drought, with big "flash fuel" crops of dry grasses ready to ignite, said national Fire Information Center spokesman Sheldon Wimmer.

There have been fires in all those places in the past week. In Arizona, U.S. Forest Service officials estimated that a lightning fire in the Tonto Forest did \$5.7 million damage and cost nearly that much in fire-fighting expenses and wages. It was the worst forest fire in Arizona history.

DEAD

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Walton said logistically the concert presented no problems.

"Everything went unbelievably well. It was more of a love fest than anything else."

She said after the concert the only suggestions for improvements were providing a few more dumpsters and having a direct communication link with Whitebird medical clinic.

One concern that had been raised by community members was the reputation of drug use that characterizes Grateful Dead concerts.

"We had a lot of drug use," said Eugene Police Capt. Dick Loveall. "A lot were (using drugs) but a lot weren't."

There were about 30 drug arrests outside the concert, Loveall said.

"Inside the stadium it was a very quiet group," he said.

"People were just listening to music and having a good time."

Most of the drug arrests and citations involved the distribution or possession of marijuana, LSD or mushrooms, said EPD spokesman Capt. Tim Birr.

Loveall said his main priority was crowd management, and in that respect there were no problems. According to Loveall there was no fighting or violence reported.

"I'm amazed that that many people can get together anywhere and have no problems," he said. "On the other hand you have a segment of the police community that says there are just too many drugs."

Walton agreed that there are two sides to the Grateful Dead issue.

"From a logistics point of view and the point of view of the police there is no reason the Grateful Dead should not be welcome back," she said.

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