

Fireworks

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Well, another 4th of July has come and gone, and thankfully I've come out unscathed. I remember as a kid my dad would bring me to the fireworks tent in Gordy's Supermarket parking lot. For \$5 we would get sparklers, snakes and my personal favorite, smoke bombs.

One summer we drove to Disney World. On the way home, after hundreds of miles of begging, my dad stopped at a fireworks warehouse in Tennessee. When we walked in, my jaw dropped after seeing aisles and aisles of explosives. We left with bottle rockets, bricks of fireworks, and every kid's dream – a case of M80s. That 4th of July, as Homer Simpson would say, we celebrated the independence of our nation by blowing up a small part of it.

While the laws may be a little slack in Tennessee, Wisconsin strictly regulates fireworks. In the Dairy State, it is illegal to sell fireworks or possess fireworks with the intent to sell them except to a person with a permit or to a municipality. "Fireworks" are anything manufactured to explode, emit sparks or combustion that do not have another common use. Some similar items that are not excluded from this definition are fuels, ammunition, emergency flares, tobacco products, matches and lighters.

Some smaller "fireworks" do not fall under this definition, such as caps, party-poppers, and small cylindrical or cone fountains.

Not only is it difficult to sell fireworks, it is illegal to possess or use fireworks without a user's permit issued by a Wisconsin municipality. While municipalities are not required to obtain a permit, local fire and law enforcement officials must be notified of the proposed use of fireworks at least 2 days in advance.

Permits may only be issued to public authorities, fairs, amusement parks, civic organizations, or certain groups of individuals, but never to minors. When issuing a permit, municipalities may require either an indemnity bond or a policy of liability insurance to cover injuries or property damage resulting from the fireworks.

A fireworks permit must contain the name and address of the permit holder, the date on and after which fireworks may be purchased and what kind and quantity of fireworks may be purchased, and the date and location of the permitted use. Like municipalities, permit holders must also notify local fire or law enforcement officials at least 2 days before firing them off.

Wisconsin even regulates the storage of fireworks. For example, people who store fireworks must first notify local fire officials and they can only keep them in premises equipped with fire extinguishers. The fireworks can't be stored within 50 feet of a dwelling or a facility where more than one gallon of flammable liquid is dispersed, like gas stations. Finally, smoking is most certainly not allowed.

My dad would have been interested to know that parents and legal guardians that allow minors to use fireworks are liable for any resulting damages. Municipalities, however, are not liable for damages caused by fireworks just for issuing a permit. Counties and municipalities are also free to implement more restrictive ordinances governing fireworks.

Violating these statutes could result in a fine of up to \$10,000 or up to 9 months in jail, or both. As long as "Crazy Craig's," my favorite fireworks stand, carries smoke bombs, I'll be happy.