



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Celebrating with bonfires and fireworks

A community guide

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# Remember, Remember

*“Remember, remember the fifth of November,  
Gunpowder treason and plot.  
We see no reason  
Why gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot!”*

*Guy Fawkes, guy, t'was his intent  
To blow up king and parliament.  
Three score barrels were laid below  
To prove old England's overthrow.  
By God's mercy he was catch'd*

*With a darkened lantern and burning match.  
So, holler boys, holler boys, Let the bells ring.  
Holler boys, holler boys, God save the king.”*

“On 5 November 1605, Guy Fawkes was caught in the cellars of the Houses of Parliament with 36 barrels of gunpowder, as part of a terrorist plot to blow up Parliament and King James I (King James VI of Scotland) on the occasion of the State Opening of Parliament. Guy Fawkes was subsequently tried as a traitor with his co-conspirators for plotting against the King and Government. The following year in 1606 it became an annual custom for the King and Parliament to commission a sermon to commemorate the event.

Parliament passed the *Observance of 5th November Act* –commonly known as the ‘*Thanksgiving Act*’ - which introduced an annual public day of thanksgiving for the plot’s failure. Although the Act was repealed in the 19th Century, the tradition of bonfires and fireworks continues, including burning effigies of Guy Fawkes on the bonfire. This practice, together with the nursery rhyme “Remember, remember the 5th of November”, ensured that this crime would never be forgotten.

To this day, prior to each State Opening of Parliament by the Queen, the Yeomen of the Guard still searches the cellars of the Palace of Westminster for gunpowder. And ‘Guy Fawkes Night’ or ‘Bonfire Night’ remains a day of celebration in British culture.

Of course, bonfires and fireworks are not just used on 5th November. New years Eve, Diwali and Chinese New year all provide great opportunities for communities to come together and celebrate. National events like the Queens Golden Jubilee in 2012, and this year the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE Day are perfect opportunities to celebrate and remember with bonfires and beacons lit up across the country.

This guide provides some practical advice and information for local communities that want to hold their own local celebrations, bringing together people from across class, culture and creed to mark the very British tradition of thanksgiving for the British Monarchy and Parliament.”

**Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP**  
*Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government*

## Organised displays

Many local authorities, schools and community groups hold firework displays to mark certain occasions and they are a great place to enjoy a good night out. They are sometimes free of charge and many raise money for local charities. Fireworks can be expensive. You're likely to get more dazzle and bang at an organised event. And, you won't have to plan and host it yourself, taking responsibility for the safety aspects.

Enjoying the fireworks in your local park with your local community – sharing the 'oohs' and 'aahs' in the crowd – can be a great way of getting together, meeting with your friends and neighbours and sharing in your local community spirit. But remember to take a torch along with you and make sure children wear bright clothes so they can be easily seen.

## Hosting a fireworks party

If you have a safe place to do so and want to celebrate with fireworks in the comfort of your own garden or on other private land (with the landowner's permission), there's nothing to stop you and there's no reason why you can't enjoy a great evening. But remember that both you and your guests will need to take care.

These tips are to help you think about and prepare for a fun and safe celebration at home.

Plan ahead:

- Fireworks must be stored safely, in a closed box, somewhere cool and dry, out of reach of children and animals, until the time they are needed. Don't keep the box under the stairs or in a passageway.
- Do you have a large enough space to let fireworks off safely? Each firework should have a minimum safety distance marked on it.
- Be considerate to your neighbours: warn them beforehand so they can take in their washing, close windows, keep their pets indoors and, if necessary, take other precautions. Why not invite them?
- Only buy fireworks from reputable dealers. The fireworks should have the product safety marking BS7114 or equivalent and carry a CE mark.
- Most shops have only been given permission to sell fireworks on or between these dates:
  - 15 October to 10 November
  - 26 to 31 December
  - 3 days before Diwali and Chinese New Year

To buy fireworks at other times, you must go to specially licensed shops.

- Fireworks cannot be let off between 11pm and 7am except on:
  - Bonfire Night (5 November), when the cut off is midnight;
  - New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year, when the cut off is 1am.

#### Party time:

- Fireworks must only be handled and lit by responsible adults.
- Alcohol and fire don't mix – nor do alcohol and fireworks.
- Keep fireworks in a closed box well away from the bonfire or any other sources of heat or fire.
- Follow the instructions on each firework. Different fireworks can present different hazards and so the instructions vary.
- Use a torch if you read the instructions in the dark – do not use a naked flame.
- Let fireworks off one at a time.
- Do not throw fireworks – it is highly dangerous.
- Light them at arm's length, using a taper.
- Never play with fireworks – they are explosives and can hurt you.
- When you are watching fireworks, stand well back.
- Never go near a firework that has been lit. Even if it hasn't gone off, it could still explode.
- Hold sparklers one at a time in gloved hands at arm's length. When the sparkler goes out, it is still very hot so put it end down in a bucket of water.
- Never leave matches or lighters lying around
- We recommend that you **do not use** sky lanterns as you have no control over them once they've been set off. They can kill animals, litter the countryside and start fires. If you do choose to set them off, always follow the manufacturers' guidance/instructions carefully.

#### Clearing up:

- Pick up the spent firework cases – they can still be dangerous. Look for fireworks with a torch. Use tongs or some other suitable tool and wear heatproof gloves.
- Don't allow children to collect firework cases.
- If any firework looks as if it hasn't gone off after at least half an hour, soak it in water to prevent it reigniting.

## Having a bonfire or beacon

A bonfire or beacon are great ways to celebrate Bonfire Night and other events, but do follow these safety tips:

- You can't get rid of household waste on the bonfire if it will cause pollution or harm people's health. You should always burn dry material as it produces less smoke. Never burn treated wood, rubber, plastic, foam or paint.

- Warn your neighbours beforehand so they can take in any washing, close windows, keep pets indoors and take other necessary precautions.
- Build your bonfire well clear of buildings, roads, garden sheds, fences, trees and hedges and, if possible, choose somewhere sheltered from wind to minimise the risk of the bonfire being blown out of control or of smoke restricting the vision of road users.
- Check there are no cables – like telephone wires – above the bonfire.
- Before you light the bonfire, check whether any pets, wildlife or small children have crawled inside.
- Always keep a bucket of water or a working hosepipe nearby in case of fire.
- Never use flammable liquids to start a bonfire and never throw on fireworks or burn dangerous items such as aerosol cans, paint tins, foam furniture or batteries.
- Don't leave bonfires unattended and keep children and pets away. A responsible adult should supervise the bonfire until it has burnt out.
- Once the bonfire has died down, pour water on the embers to stop it reigniting.

## Further guidance

If you are running a large event these require more planning and organisation. The Cabinet Office has produced a 'Can do' guide for those planning a more organised voluntary or community event:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events>

Both the Health and Safety Executive and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have produced helpful guidance on how to organise and run a safe and successful firework display, some of which may be useful for smaller events:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/explosives/fireworks/using.htm>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/31866/10-1039-fireworks-safety-displays.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31866/10-1039-fireworks-safety-displays.pdf)

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has created a website with firework safety tips: <http://www.saferfireworks.com/>

Guidance on fireworks law can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/fireworks-the-law>

Guidance on bonfire rules can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/garden-bonfires-rules>

Guidance on using sky lanterns safely can be found here: <http://ow.ly/i/3CkqS/original>