

Stay Safe This Independence Day

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St. Charles County, Missouri – As we approach the Fourth of July, many St. Charles County residents will celebrate their Independence Day outdoors with sunshine, barbecue grills and, possibly, fireworks. However, if not properly monitored, the high temperatures, bright sunshine and the bangs, booms or sparks from fireworks can cause harm to people and their pets.

Protecting Against Heat-Related Illness and Sun Damage

Extreme heat/humidity and bright sunlight can lead to heat-related illnesses — especially in young children, the elderly and those who may have difficulties caring for themselves. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cautions that around 100 Americans die each year from the heat, and that many more suffer through over-exertion and stress. Taking simple steps in advance can keep you and your family safe during a heat wave:

- Drink more fluids, regardless of your activity level. Do not wait until you're thirsty to drink.
- Limit your intake of liquids containing alcohol or large amounts of sugar, as these can actually cause your body to lose even more fluids.
- Stay indoors (in an air-conditioned location) whenever possible. Please call the United Way's 2-1-1 information line or visit www.health.mo.gov to find heat-relief shelters in our area.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing.
- DO NOT leave anyone or any animals in a closed, parked car, as interior temperatures can grow rapidly during a hot day.
- If you experience or notice someone experiencing warning signs of heat-related illnesses (extremely high body temperatures, red/dry skin with no sweating, rapid pulse rate, dizziness/nausea/confusion, or unconsciousness), please seek immediate medical assistance while beginning to cool the victim.

Along with causing higher temperatures, bright, sunny skies can damage your skin. Overexposure may cause severe sunburn and may lead to skin cancer, which is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Avoiding peak periods (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.), when ultraviolet (UV) rays are strongest, is the best way to minimize your risk, but taking other steps adds to your protection. Using a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher on all exposed areas will protect from UVA and UVB rays, but this sunscreen must be continually re-applied — especially after excessive sweating or time in the pool. Sunglasses that block UVA and UVB rays are necessary to protect your eyes from the potentially damaging effects of UV rays.

Safety During Backyard Barbecues

Backyard barbecues and picnics are a rite of summer. To prevent food-borne illnesses from ruining your holiday celebration, follow simple guidelines for food safety. The first rule is to keep things clean — wash hands and utensils before and after handling foods, and clean surfaces

before and after using them. Be sure to separate items to prevent cross-contamination during the preparation process. Cooking meats to proper temperatures (145° F for steaks, 160° F for hamburgers and pork steaks, 165° F for chicken) will kill bacteria that cause most food illnesses. When serving and storing, it's important to use a thermometer and proper equipment to ensure that cold foods stay cold and hot foods stay hot.

A good chef is also a safe chef, so follow manufacturer's guidelines for proper use of equipment. If you have a gas grill, check hoses and canisters for damage prior to lighting the flame. An electric starter or charcoal chimney is a great way to safely start a charcoal grill, and remember to wait until the coals reach temperature before cooking. Using a squirt bottle and a nearby fire extinguisher can control flare-ups, and flame-retardant gloves can limit possibilities for burns. Lastly, keep kids and pets away from open flames or hot grills at all times.

Firework Safety For People and Pets

For many, fireworks are an integral part of their Independence Day celebration, but these explosives can be dangerous. Every year, more than 6,000 people end up in hospital emergency rooms with firework-related injuries. If consumer fireworks are legal where you live, and you or your neighbors choose to set them off on your own, please read and review all warnings and instructions for use. Do not allow children to ignite or play with fireworks. Only light fireworks on a smooth, flat surface that is away from people, buildings, structures, dry leaves or other flammable materials, and never try to relight fireworks that have not fully functioned. In case of malfunction or fire, be sure to keep a bucket of water and a fire extinguisher close.

In addition to possible injuries to people, many pets are frightened by the loud noises created by fireworks and will run away trying to escape the sound. Local animal shelters often experience an increase in impounds leading up to the holiday because of pets that run from their homes to flee loud fireworks displays. If your dog or cat is sensitive to these loud noises, don't take chances. Protect your pets by following these simple tips.

- Keep your pet calm and secured indoors in a pet crate or a dark room with the door closed. In their panic, even the best behaved animals may try to bite or run away.
- If your dog is normally kept outside, put them inside the garage to prevent injuries from inadvertent fireworks or mischief.
- Don't assume your pet won't react because you haven't had problems in the past. Many animals develop sensitivity to loud noises later in life.
- Make sure your pets are wearing an identification tag and/or microchip. The St. Charles County Pet Adoption Center will microchip pets for \$10.00. Call 636.949.PETS (7387) for more information.

The St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment is committed to the protection and enhancement of health and the quality of life for all members of our community. To discover ways that the department assists this region, or to learn about volunteer opportunities with any of the three divisions — Public Health, Environmental Public Health and Protection, and Humane Services — please visit <http://health.sccmo.org> or call 636.949.7400.