Friendly Fireworks

(Fireworks photo courtesy Melrose Pyrotechnics, Inc.)

Through the year, and especially during the summer holiday season, DNR staff work to ensure that fireworks are handled safely.

(Photo courtesy of Michael Falter.)

A pyrotechnician demonstrates proper mortar loading technique.

Story By Jim Hafliger

Detonation velocity, single and multi-break shells, mortar construction, separation distance, squibs, magazines, duds, misfires, hang-fires and molecular composition—topics not familiar to the average person, but the language of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Office of Mines and Minerals, Mine Safety and Training Division staff and more than 1,500 licensed pyro-technicians (display fireworks users) in Illinois.

DNR is the lead state agency regulating the handling, storage, use, possession and purchase of commercial explosives, including display fireworks, under the Illinois Explosives Act. The Act requires that anyone purchasing, possessing, using, transferring or disposing of explosives, including display fireworks, be licensed by DNR. In addition, individuals or companies storing such explosives must have an explosives storage facility certified through DNR's Mine Safety and Training Division. Nearly 1 million pounds of display fireworks are currently regulated and certified by DNR.

DNR explosive licensing provisions apply to display fireworks, not consumer or personal fireworks such as Roman candles, bottle rockets or firecrackers. The fireworks seen in commercial displays are usually aerial shells containing more than 2 grains of explosive material.

Training and examination, as well as F.B.I. and Illinois State Police background checks, are required of applicants for an Individual Explosive License and pyro-technicians using display fireworks in Illinois, unless specifically exempted.

DNR's explosives regulatory program is administered through regional offices located in Ottawa, Springfield and Benton. Monthly training and examinations are scheduled at these offices, with additional sessions as needed.

Severe penalties may be imposed for violations of the Illinois Explosives Act. Anyone possessing, using, transferring or purchasing display fireworks without a valid license or storage certificate is guilty of a Class 3 felony. In addition, DNR can assess administrative fines up to $5,000 for violations involving unlawful use of display fireworks and other explosives.

For more information on the Illinois Explosives Act and its provisions regarding display fireworks contact the DNR, Office of Mines and Minerals, Mine Safety and Training Division at (217) 782-9976.

Pyrotechnicians prepare the annual fireworks display at Lake Taylorville.

(Photo courtesy of Jeff Nolen.)

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