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PLATTE CHAT

It's Time to Relax Nebraska's Firework Regulations to Missouri's Standards

Berk Brown
Platte Institute Editor

From Chadron to Falls City and Imperial to Winside, firework stands will open for business today all across Nebraska. As the sounds of Independence Day remind us of our hard-fought freedom, keep in mind that Nebraska's overzealous regulation of fireworks is antithetical to the liberty fireworks represent.

Why is it that Nebraska places much tighter restrictions on permissible fireworks than bordering-state Missouri? The answer always seems to come back to public safety. The government apparently wants to protect us from ourselves with these regulations. It's high time, we believe, to put all the emotional media hype aside and have a dispassionate discussion about fireworks in Nebraska.

Myth Buster: Nebraska isn't safer than Missouri when it comes to fireworks

Data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety

- [Ashland Gazette](#)
- [Aurora News-Register](#)
- [Beatrice Daily Sun](#)
- [Bellevue Leader](#)
- [Blair Enterprise](#)
- [Burwell Tribune](#)
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- [Hickman Voice News](#)
- [Hyannis Grant County News](#)
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- [Kearney Hub](#)
- [Lexington Clipper-Herald](#)
- [McCook Gazette](#)
- [Nebraska City News-Press](#)

Commission shows that firework-related injuries are decreasing nationwide, yet information from the Nebraska State Fire Marshal says injuries are increasing in Nebraska. According to the U.S. CPSC report, injuries per 100,000 people stood at 4.3 in 1991 and dropped to 3.1 in 2006. Inexplicably, there were 61 firework-related injuries in Nebraska in 1991 while there were 147 injuries in 2006, an increase of more than 140 percent. Moreover, Missouri had one injury for every 14,609 residents in 2006 while Nebraska had one injury for every 11,564 residents. It's counter intuitive, but statistics show that the Show Me State is safer than the Cornhusker State.

Many critics argue that fireworks are fire hazards. The United States Fire Administration reported that there were 23,200 firework-related fires in 2002 which resulted in no deaths. The report also states that the total amount of damage done by a firework-related fire is, on average, \$1,841. By comparison, the same administration reported that there were 11,600 Christmas tree-related fires in 2000 and there is an annual average of 40 fatalities because of them. The average amount of damage done by such a fire was measured at \$8,063. So, while there are twice as many firework-related fires, Christmas tree-related fires do more than twice the damage. Despite the disparity, there's no outcry for greater regulation of Christmas trees.

The impact of excessive regulation on the economy in Nebraska

Consumption of fireworks continues to grow in the United States. From 2000-2008, the amount of purchased fireworks grew from 152 million pounds to 213 million pounds— a 40 percent increase – according to the American Pyrotechnics Association. In Nebraska, however, availability of fireworks is steadily declining. The number of public firework displays has dropped from 441 in 2004 to 329 in 2009 – a decrease of more than 25 percent. The number of licensed firework stands also has dropped – from 785 in 2004 to 710 in 2009, a decrease of nearly 10 percent.

As we all know, residents of Nebraska drive to Missouri

- [Norfolk Daily News](#)
- [North Platte Bulletin](#)
- [North Platte Telegraph](#)
- [Omaha Catholic Voice](#)
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- [Seward County Independent](#)
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- [Superior Express](#)
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- [Syracuse Journal-Democrat](#)
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to get fireworks, so our state loses out from the sales tax generated from those purchases. At a time of declining sales tax revenues in our state, why does the State of Nebraska limit firework sales if there's no compelling public safety issue.

Conclusion

Government certainly has a duty to provide public safety to its citizens, but there's also an inferred obligation to only make laws which truly protects the public. We threw off the chains of tyranny on July 4th, 1776; mindless regulation of fireworks is contrary to the reason we celebrate the day. Judging by the steady racket of noise from most neighborhoods, our antiquated firework laws are widely flouted. We therefore advocate a thorough review of our firework regulations with the goal of enacting and enforcing laws that truly provide public safety without unnecessarily restricting our freedoms. Moving toward having the same permissible firework standards as Missouri would be a good step.

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