



Office for Product
Safety & Standards

Consumer behaviours and attitudes to fireworks

Research Report: 2021/025

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Executive summary

Background

The Office for Product Safety and Standards at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy commissioned Ipsos MORI to provide evidence on people's attitudes towards and behaviours around using fireworks in the UK.

A mix of quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken between November 2019 and March 2020. This included:

- Eight ethnographic interviews with participants attending organised public displays and five ethnographic interviews with participants hosting a private fireworks display;
- Ten telephone depth interviews with fireworks 'rejectors', defined as those who do not like and actively avoid fireworks;
- Seven telephone depth interviews with industry stakeholders representing import, retail and industry associations.
- A quantitative face-to-face survey with 1,969 adults in Great Britain.

This report presents findings from the research conducted.

Attitudes towards fireworks

The British public are broadly favourable towards fireworks.

- A majority of those surveyed say they personally enjoy fireworks, and almost half have been to either a public or private display within the last three years.

A third of those surveyed say they do not enjoy fireworks.

- The reasons for this are varied and relate to: safety, particularly at private events; the environmental impact of fireworks; anti-social behaviour and misuse of fireworks; and distress to individuals and animals including pets, children and those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or anxiety.
- Those who had experience of an injury because of fireworks (either personally or through a friend or family member) tended to be more concerned about safety at private events, and to support further regulation of both public and private displays.

Differences in views towards public and private displays

Attitudes differ significantly between organised public and private fireworks displays.

- Survey participants tend to view organised public fireworks displays more favourably than those hosted by private individuals. A majority agree that they are a good way to bring people together in the community and to mark important occasions.
- For participants in the ethnography, they had often become an annual tradition, used to celebrate key milestones in the lives of families and friends. For a minority, they held cultural significance and were used to mark religious holidays.

In contrast, the public tend to hold more negative attitudes towards private fireworks displays.

- Over half of survey participants say private fireworks displays are disruptive to the community, and a similar proportion consider them bad for the environment.
- Just a sixth have been to a private fireworks display within the last three years, and fewer than one in ten have hosted a display.

Safety of fireworks displays

A key differentiator of views between public and private displays is safety.

- Whilst a majority of the general public surveyed agree that organised public fireworks displays are safe, a little under half say the same of private fireworks displays. In fact, a similar proportion consider private fireworks displays to be unsafe.
- Participants in the ethnography thought that public events were planned and run by experts who made safety driven decisions: this reassured them about safety at the event. They were also reassured by the presence of physical barriers to maintain public distance from fireworks, security checks at the entrance to the event, and the visibility of stewards.
- A variety of safety behaviours were observed at private fireworks displays. While participants agreed that safety was a priority for enjoying an event, not all practices aligned with industry guidance. There was little use of the instructions that came with fireworks, and fireworks were often lit with a lighter rather than the taper provided. It was most often a lack of awareness of industry guidance, rather than a lack of willingness to comply, that hindered safety at a private event.

Survey participants feel that responsibility for safe use of fireworks lies with consumers and manufacturers.

- Specifically, survey participants feel that responsibility lies with people who organise displays, manufacturers, and the individuals who use fireworks.
- A minority say responsibility lies with government.

Awareness of and attitudes towards regulation

Half of survey participants say they know nothing about how fireworks are regulated in the UK. When prompted for awareness of specific rules and regulations, a majority were unaware of each, with the exception of the age limit for the purchase of fireworks.

- Participants were also unclear about how to safely store fireworks. Just a sixth of survey participants who had bought fireworks stored them in a shed, while two-fifths stored them in their house, and a fifth in their garage. Ethnographic participants stored fireworks in many different places, most often somewhere cold, dry and away from children or pets.

Whilst awareness of specific rules and regulations is limited, survey participants who have an opinion agree on balance that the amount of regulation surrounding organised public fireworks displays is about right. In contrast, two-fifths would support further regulation of private fireworks displays.

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- Very few back an outright ban on organised public fireworks displays or a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public for private use. However, there is support for time limits on the sale and use of fireworks, time limits on organised public fireworks displays, and for limiting the sale of fireworks to specialist shops.
 - Industry stakeholders are keen to highlight the importance of enforcing current laws both to ensure appropriate and legal sale and use of fireworks, but also to demonstrate the consequences and penalties if these are broken. Stakeholders feel that nation-wide education could support public understanding and awareness of fireworks safety.
 - However, there is limited interest from the public in finding out more about how fireworks are regulated in Great Britain. If people wanted to find out more, they say they would go to the internet or gov.uk. Less than one in ten would visit a specialist fireworks shop.

Introduction

Background and objectives

The Office for Product Safety and Standards at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy commissioned Ipsos MORI to provide evidence on people's attitudes towards and behaviours around using fireworks in the UK.

This report draws together findings from exploratory research seeking to uncover fresh insights about an important aspect of many social and cultural celebrations in the UK, taking a holistic view of how consumers interact with fireworks – across buying, storing and using fireworks (for those who do), and understanding more about why people attend public displays or host private displays and how they feel about them. There is limited evidence about people's perceptions of and attitudes towards fireworks and this research seeks to fill that gap.

The objectives of the research were to explore:

- Consumer awareness of issues relating to fireworks.
 - Levels of awareness and understanding of fireworks safety including attitudes towards safety considerations and perceived risk of using fireworks.
- Behaviours when attending public events or hosting a private event.
 - Consumer behaviours when purchasing, storing and using fireworks.
- Consumers' attitudes towards fireworks.
 - To what extent the public enjoy fireworks, and in what settings.
 - Views regarding any negative impacts from fireworks.

Research methods and samples

To fully address the objectives the research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. An overview of these is provided in Figure 2.1.



Figure 2.1: Overview of research methods

Ethnographic research

A phase of staged ethnographic research took place first, allowing researchers to spend time with members of the public attending organised fireworks events or hosting their own private events. The aim of this method was to understand how the public interact with fireworks and to explore contexts in which fireworks are used and play a role in peoples' lives.

The stages of the ethnographic research varied for those participants attending a private display and a public display, tailored to best capture participants' experiences from planning the evening to the display's end. These stages are summarised in Figure 2.2 below.

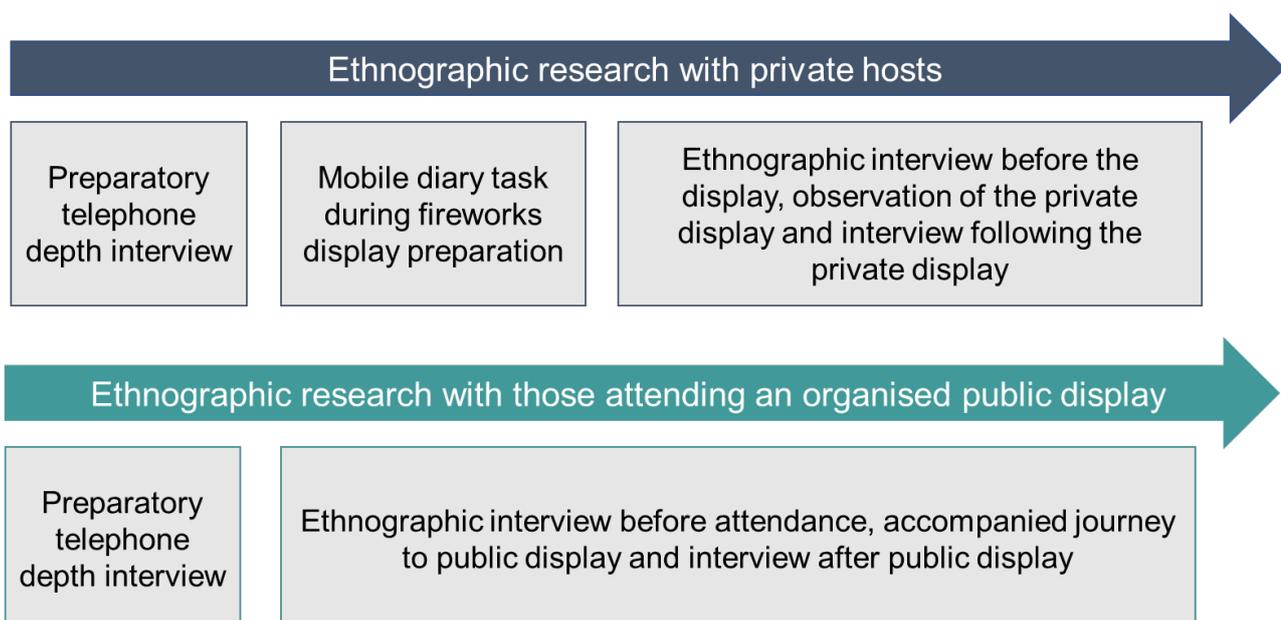


Figure 2.2: Summary of ethnographic approach

A staged ethnographic research approach was employed for the following reasons:

- Including both interviews and an observational stage allowed researchers to triangulate observational data and interview data to develop a fuller picture of how participants interacted with fireworks.
- Structuring each research session to include an opening interview stage and a closing interview stage meant participants were less obliged to check in with the researchers once the event was underway. This allowed the researchers to observe during the display and then follow up with questions about observations after the event.
- The initial interview provided time for researchers to introduce themselves to participants, explain the purposes of the research, gather their consent to take part and to understand more about their decision to host or attend a fireworks display.
- Final interviews supported participants in reflecting on their experience of the fireworks display and allowed the researcher to probe on any themes identified through observations and to wrap-up the research encounter.

A preparatory telephone interview was carried out with participants before the face-to-face research encounter. During this interview, researchers introduced themselves to participants, arranged the face-to-face encounter – and were able to gain an initial understanding of how the participants were feeling in the build up to the fireworks display. Private hosts took part in a participant-led mobile diary task. This was required to capture the experiences of participants buying fireworks and planning the display in the days leading up to the face-to-face fieldwork.

Ethnographic fieldwork began in November with participants recruited who were attending or hosting fireworks events from week commencing 3rd November 2019. Whilst we were not able to attend any fireworks events for Diwali (27 October 2019), we did attend a fireworks event with a family who had recently celebrated Diwali. Each ethnography was carried out by a researcher and a filmmaker ensuring that observations were captured on video. Further detail regarding the ethnographic research approach is provided in the technical appendix.

Ethnography research sample

Ethnographic research was conducted with five families hosting a private event in their home and eight who attended public fireworks displays. All fieldwork took place between 2nd and 11th November 2019.

Participants were sampled purposively. In doing so, we selected a spread of criteria for inclusion across the sample including:

- Those who attended public displays, and those who hosted private displays, reflecting that there may be differences in these experiences.
- Participants were included from the four nations of the UK – Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England - enabling us to explore and understand cultural differences in fireworks use between these nations.
- Those living in rural and urban areas, enabling us to explore differences in experiences of attending or hosting events in rural areas and more urban, built up areas.
- A mix of gender, age and ethnicity to mitigate against the research focusing on a particular gender, age group or ethnicity which could have limited the diversity of experiences gathered.

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- Inclusion of those at different life-stages including families with young children, families with no children and older participants with grandchildren. We theorised that these groups may have different experiences of hosting or attending a fireworks display.

Qualitative retrospective interview

A retrospective interview was carried out with a participant who had hosted or attended a fireworks display but were not able to participate in an ethnographic interview. This means the fireworks display they hosted or attended was not observed by a researcher. Instead, participants were asked to recall the event and describe it to the researcher. This interview was carried out via telephone and included one participant who had attended a public fireworks display for Chinese New Year. Fieldwork for this interview took on 25th January 2020.

Qualitative interviews with rejecters

Ten interviews were carried out with rejecters of fireworks, who are defined as those who do not like and actively avoid fireworks. Fieldwork took place between 12th and 19th December 2019. The aim of these interviews was to explore views of those with negative attitudes towards, and experiences of fireworks. To ensure we included a range of views, these interviews included:

- three participants with a child who is frightened or distressed by fireworks;
- three participants with a pet / horse that is frightened or distressed by fireworks;
- three participants who were personally worried about fireworks due to a physical or mental health condition;
- one participant who had a previous negative experience with fireworks.

These interviews were conducted over the telephone with participants from across the country and were recruited to reflect a range of backgrounds and life stages.

Qualitative interviews with industry stakeholders

Seven telephone depth interviews with industry stakeholders representing importing, retailing and industry associations also took place to understand the industry view regarding: consumer expectations of fireworks; consumer handling of fireworks; media coverage around fireworks; and regulation of fireworks.

Recruitment for participants taking part in qualitative research

Participants for ethnographic research, the retrospective interview and interviews with rejecters were recruited by a specialist qualitative recruitment agency, Criteria Fieldwork. To determine eligibility for participation, potential participants were invited to take part using a recruitment screening questionnaire. For example, people in different areas of the country were asked a set of questions designed to identify those hosting a private fireworks display or attending a public display.

Fireworks survey

Findings from the ethnographic and qualitative research informed questionnaire design for the survey. An initial draft of the survey questions was tested with eight face-to-face cognitive interviews on 10th and 11th February 2020 in Manchester and London. The purpose of the interview was to check that the questions were easy to understand and explore whether participants understood them as intended.

Ipsos MORI interviewers then conducted 1,969 at home face-to-face interviews with members of the general public between 21st February and 12th March 2020. The interview involved a 15 minute survey asked of 973 GB adults, plus an additional 5 minutes of survey questions asked of a further 996 GB adults. For the full questionnaire see Appendix E in the Technical Annex.

The survey covered the following topic areas:

- **Interactions with fireworks**, including buying, storing and using them, and attending displays – whether and how consumers do these personally or in their household.
- **Attitudinal questions** – whether they enjoy fireworks or not, including reasons why, the environmental and community impact of fireworks, and the cultural significance of fireworks.
- **Perceived risks** – for fireworks in general, and more specifically for private displays for those who organise or attend them, and for public displays for those who attend.
- **Awareness and experiences of negative impacts of fireworks** – including accidents, injuries and other concerns that emerge from the qualitative research.
- **Awareness and understanding of firework safety** – this could include both direct and indirect questions (e.g. about whether they behave in certain ways OPSS may consider risky, even if they are legal)

Quantitative Sample

Ipsos MORI's 'Capibus' – a face-to-face omnibus survey - uses a form of random location sampling and quotas to produce a high-quality representative sample¹.

Weighting are calculations that make the achieved sample match the population as closely as possible with the aim of reducing bias in the survey estimates. The final data have been weighted by using a 'rim weighting' system which weights to the latest set of census data or mid-year estimates and NRS defined profiles for age, social grade, region and employment status - within gender and additional profiles on tenure and ethnicity.

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252, the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and with the Ipsos MORI Terms and Conditions.

Social Media Analytics

Data collection

Ipsos MORI used the social media analytics platform Synthesio to collect social media data relating to fireworks. To collect the relevant data, a user defined search query was developed by Ipsos MORI, based around firework-related terms. A 'query' is a search formula that uses a combination of keywords (which are not case sensitive) and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT, NEAR) to isolate information. The query was kept broad and simple to capture a wide range of relevant data that mentioned 'fireworks' or 'bonfire night'. The full query can be found in the appendices.

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/face-face-omnibus-capibus>

In total, the query collected 626,628 posts from Synthesio between 1st October 2019 and 31st January 2020. These posts were filtered by geo-location metadata and language to ensure that they were UK-based and English-language only before being exported from Synthesio for analysis. This resulted in a sample of 145,559 posts, though it is likely that many more of the full sample were also based in the UK (not every post is geo-tagged).

Only public content that was still available at the time of data capture (i.e. had not been deleted by the user) was captured. It is also important to note that the dataset includes content posted on behalf of groups or organisations, as well as by individuals.

Data analysis and reporting

A top-down text analytics approach was used to help provide more insight on the key themes within the data. Analysis was conducted using the Insius text analytics software, drawing on two random samples of social media posts.

1. A random sample of 50,000 posts taken from across the full timeseries;
2. A random sample of 50,000 posts taken from the week either side of Bonfire Night.

Once duplicates between the two datasets were removed, there was a final dataset of 78,137 posts. Qualitative review and analysis was applied by experienced Ipsos MORI researchers to unpick the discussion within the key themes and interpret the meaning and nuances within the data. This kind of qualitative analysis, by its interpretive nature, involves a degree of subjectivity. Ipsos MORI researchers interpreted the data, framing their analysis with reference to the research objectives and background to the research. This involved making judgements about which topics to include.

This qualitative approach is also reflected in the way the data are reported. Although numerical data are provided on the attitudes and characteristics of social media users where appropriate, for the most part a qualitative approach to findings has been taken. It should also be noted that the figures presented throughout the report are not based on individual users as some have multiple posts captured within the dataset. As such, any figures quoted are based on the number of posts, not the number of individuals posting.

How to read the report

Interpreting the qualitative data used in this report

Qualitative research is detailed, and sometimes exploratory. It can offer insight into the perceptions, feelings, and behaviours of people. Qualitative research cannot provide a basis for generalisation in the way that is possible from social surveys based on a statistically representative sample. Evidence in this report is based on participants' perceptions. It is important to remember that even though some perceptions may not be factually accurate, they represent "the truth" to the participants and as such, are vital in understanding their attitudes and views.

In summary, **qualitative** research in this project:

- Explores the **range of attitudes and opinions** of participants in detail.
- Provides an insight into the key **reasons underlying** participants' views.
- Leads to findings that are **descriptive and illustrative**, not statistically representative.

Involves participants often holding **contradictory views**. Throughout, we have referred to “participants” and provided evidence through verbatim quotes as examples of findings. To protect participant anonymity, quotations have not been attributed. Any verbatim comments used from the social media dataset are intended to be illustrative of the original content. The wording of individual posts have been adapted slightly as to mask the author’s identity.

Case study summaries of each ethnographic interview are included in the annex.

Quantitative reporting conventions

Percentage points

Survey results are presented as percentages. Where figures do not add up to 100%, this is the result of computer rounding or multiple responses. An asterisk (*) indicates a score of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.

Reference is sometimes made to ‘percentage point difference’. This describes a numerical difference between two percentage figures – rather than an increase or decrease of the stated percent. For example, if awareness among one sub-group is 60% and in another is 70% this is a difference of ten percentage points, but not of ten per cent (which would be 60% and 66%).

Where differences between percentages are reported, these are statistically significant (95% confidence interval) unless otherwise stated in the report.

Net scores

At some points in the report ‘net scores’ are used to describe results. A net score is calculated, for example, by subtracting the proportion who disagree with a given question from the proportion who agree, resulting in a score that can range from -100% to +100%. A score above zero denotes that a larger proportion of the same agree with a given statement than disagree with it, whilst a score below zero shows the opposite – that a larger proportion disagree than agree. Net scores are calculated from full data and then rounded, which can sometimes mean that there appears to be slight discrepancies between the figures reported as net scores and the sum of percentages; however, the figures are correct, and the discrepancy is only due to the rounding of data.

Publication of data

As Ipsos MORI has been engaged to undertake an objective programme of research, it is important to protect our clients’ interests by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of findings. As with all our studies the publication of the findings of this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Attendee	Throughout the report an attendee is defined as someone who had attended either a public and/or private fireworks display within the last three years.
Host	Throughout the report a host is defined as someone who has hosted a private fireworks display within the last three years.

Negative experience with fireworks	Someone with a negative experience of fireworks is defined as someone who has (either personally or through a friend or family member) experienced physical injury due to fireworks.
Organised public fireworks display	Throughout the report organised public fireworks displays are defined as displays open to large numbers of people, either ticketed, to raise money through donations, or for free. They might be run by a professional company or by a local organisation.
Private fireworks display	Throughout the report private fireworks displays are organised by people for their friends and/or family, for example in their back garden or at a private party.

Public attitudes towards fireworks

Synopsis: *This chapter utilises findings from both the quantitative and qualitative research to explore public attitudes towards fireworks. This includes views towards the enjoyment of fireworks at both private and organised public events, the extent to which fireworks are considered a part of culture and tradition, and public views regarding the negative impact of fireworks.*

Key findings

Six in ten (61%) of those surveyed say they personally enjoy fireworks, although more people get enjoyment from public than private displays. This differentiation between the social/community and personal benefits of fireworks is reflected throughout the findings, even while fireworks can play an important role for individual families.

Organised public fireworks displays are viewed more favourably than private displays, particularly with regards to safety. Whilst a majority of the general public surveyed agree that organised public fireworks displays are safe (81%), a little under half (46%) say the same of private fireworks displays.

Two-fifths (44%) of those surveyed agree that fireworks are an important part of British culture, with participants noting the cultural role they play at Bonfire Night, New Year's Eve, Diwali, Chinese New Year and Hallowe'en.

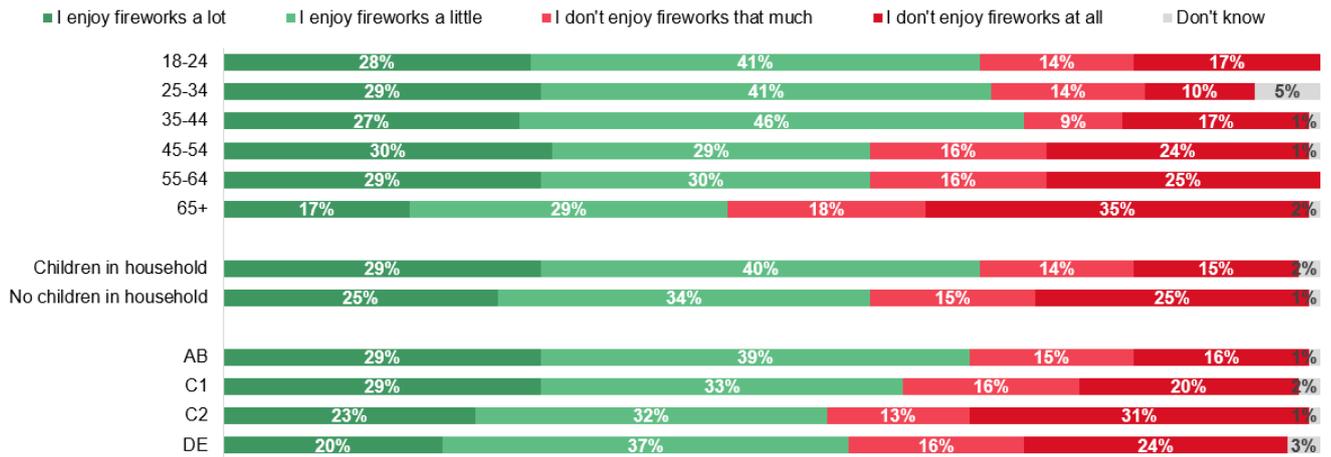
Attending or hosting a firework display often marks a family tradition, passed down through generations and are seen as a way of bringing family, friends and communities together.

The negative impacts of fireworks raised across the research relate to: safety, particularly at private events; the environmental impact of fireworks; anti-social behaviour and misuse of fireworks; and distress to individuals and animals including pets, children and those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety.

Enjoyment of fireworks

For much of the general public, fireworks are seen as an enjoyable past time. Almost two-thirds (61%) of those surveyed say they personally enjoy fireworks, and almost half (45%) have attended an organised public or private display within the last year.

The under 44s and family groups tend to be most favourable towards fireworks (see Figure 3.1). Enjoyment wanes with age, with those aged 65 and over least likely to say they personally enjoy fireworks.



Base: All participants (973)

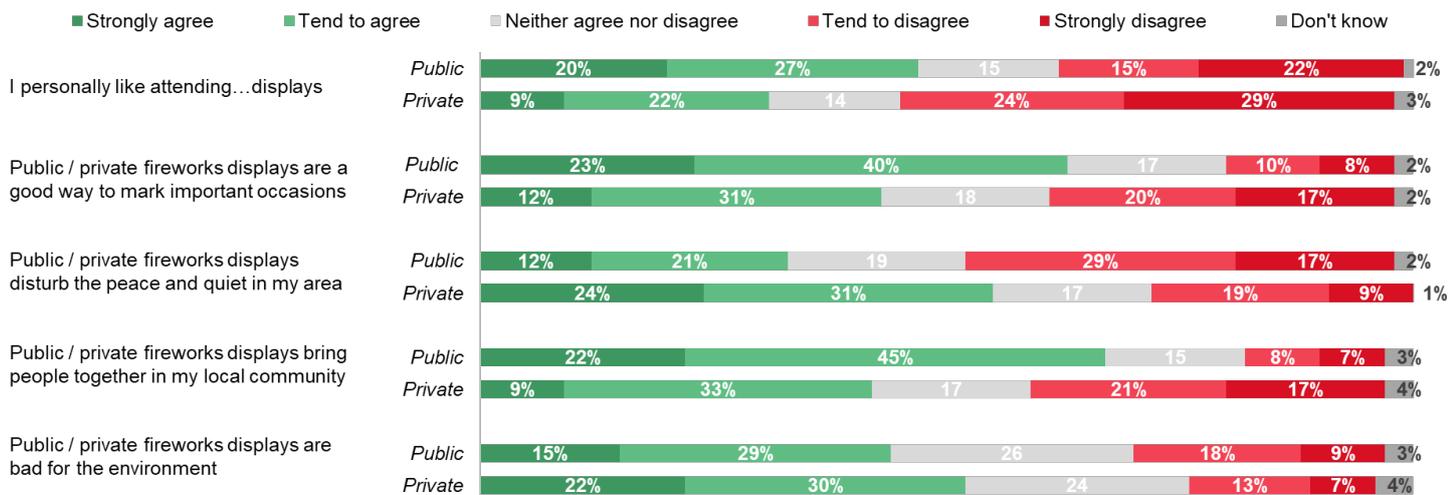
Figure 3.1: Enjoyment of fireworks

While more affluent groups tend to be more favourable towards fireworks, age remains a key predictor of attitudes. Within socio-economic group (SEG) younger participants are more likely to say they enjoy fireworks than other age brackets. There is no significant difference in attitude by region.

A little under two-fifths (37%) of survey participants say they do not enjoy fireworks. Non-attendees and those aged 65 or over are most likely to say they do not enjoy fireworks (60% and 53% respectively). Pet owners are no more likely to say they do not enjoy fireworks than non-pet owners – a majority of both say they enjoy fireworks (59% and 63%).

Public versus private events

Attitudes towards fireworks vary between public and private displays. The public tend to view organised public fireworks displays more favourably than those hosted by private individuals (see Figure 3.2).

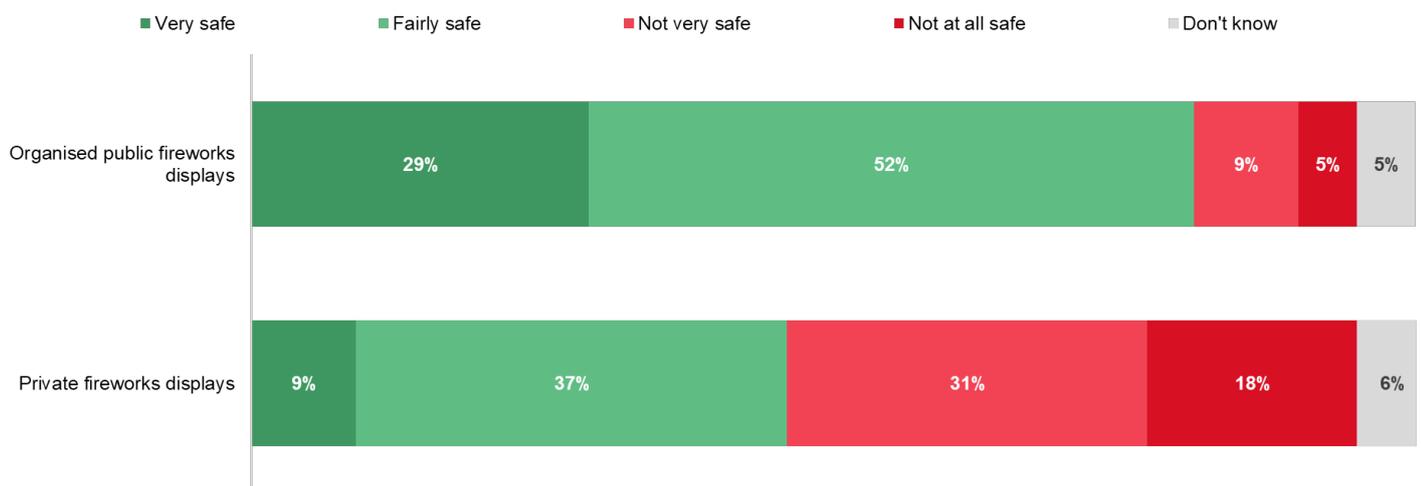


Base: All participants (973)

Figure 3.2: Attitudes towards public and private fireworks displays

There is little difference in attitudes by age, SEG, ethnicity, region or the presence of children in the household. Pet owners are more likely to hold a negative opinion of private fireworks displays, being more likely to agree that they disturb the peace and quiet in their area (61%), and more likely to disagree that they are a good way to mark important occasions (45%).

Safety is a key differentiator between the two types of display (see Figure 3.3). Whilst a majority of the general public surveyed agree that organised public fireworks displays are safe (81%), a little under half (46%) say the same of private fireworks displays. In fact, a similar proportion (49%) consider private displays to be unsafe. Women and pet owners are most likely to say private fireworks displays are unsafe (56% and 57% respectively) while private display attendees and hosts are most likely to say they are safe (62% and 63%).



Base: All participants (973)

Figure 3.3: Perceptions of safety at organised public and private fireworks displays

It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the majority of negative sentiment towards fireworks is directed at private fireworks displays. Around half consider these displays disruptive to the community (55% agree, 28% disagree) and bad for the environment (52% agree, 20% disagree).

In contrast, the public tend to view organised public fireworks displays more favourably. Two-thirds (63%) agree that public events are a good way to mark important occasions, while a similar proportion (67%) say they bring together people in the community. Whilst their environmental impact is noted (most often by women or those aged 18 to 24 years) it is considered to be less of a problem than for private displays.

The importance of fireworks to culture and tradition

Fireworks and British culture

Two-fifths (44%) of survey participants agree that fireworks are an important part of British culture.

Findings from the ethnographic research outlined the various ways that fireworks hold cultural significance for British people, discussed in more detail below.



Bonfire night



New Year's Eve



Diwali



Chinese New Year

Figure 3.4: Cultural events when fireworks played a role

Participants from a range of backgrounds thought **bonfire night** was an important British tradition. It was referred to by different names: Fireworks Night, 5th of November, and Guy Fawkes Night. It was thought to be an important date in the calendar that signified the lead up to Christmas, which in turn, was associated with the gathering of families and friends at festive occasions. Children talked about learning about Guy Fawkes at school and drew pictures that families then displayed around the home.

"I think we're quite traditional. And it's like in Britain, this is the time for fireworks so this is when we do fireworks."

Whilst mentioned by English and Welsh ethnographic participants, a Scottish family suggested that this event held less prominence in their country.

New Year's Eve was also noted as an important cultural event involving fireworks. Participants expected fireworks to be set off at midnight across the country and they looked forward to seeing this either at a display or from afar.

"We watch the fireworks at New Year through the Velux windows in my friend's loft conversion. They can see right across London, so we see all the London fireworks, and we just stand there, glass of champagne. Happy new year!"

Diwali was another cultural event for which fireworks were thought to be an important part. For participants celebrating Diwali, fireworks symbolised light and darkness.

"Diwali is all about light, it's all about darkness over light, it's all about good ... overcoming evil. And I think the fireworks are light, it's bright, it's beautiful."

Diwali, as an event in general, was thought to be instrumental in bringing families together. Celebrating families would invite friends and family to their home and offer traditional food and drink. Due to the nature of Diwali traditionally being hosted in the home, participants did not think going to a public fireworks event would be appropriate.

"There's no such thing as a structured Diwali fireworks display... Like Eid and Christmas, it's a family event."

Chinese New Year was also associated with fireworks. Participants who attended a Chinese New Year event explained that firecrackers held symbolic importance for this event. Firecrackers were traditionally lit to chase away evil spirits. However, due to safety issues, participants knew these had been replaced with fireworks.

Chinese New Year was also considered an important way to bring the Chinese community together. Having a large event was important as it showed the strength of the Chinese community which they believed would attract more Chinese people and investment to their city.

Chinese New Year

A Chinese couple from our ethnographies attended a Chinese New Year event.

“Chinese New Year brings the Chinese community together – friends catch up, talk about things. It’s a way of passing on the traditions to the next generation. Having a large event is important as it shows the strength of the Chinese community in Birmingham.”

They spoke of the symbolism associated with the event, which included wearing traditional Chinese clothes for the event and the colour red which featured in fireworks and on their clothes symbolising luck, joy and happiness.

Fireworks and family tradition

Findings from our ethnographic research illustrate how fireworks were used to celebrate milestones in the lives of families and friends, and as a way to bring people together for annual social occasions.

One family celebrated the life of their late mother by attending a fireworks display. This reminded them of special memories with her. Other families lit fireworks to celebrate birthdays for both children and adults around Bonfire night. Fireworks were felt to be an opportunity to bring something new and exciting to a birthday party.

Celebrating birthdays

One family from our ethnographies celebrate their granddaughter’s birthday every year on the 6th of November with a fireworks display. On this occasion, the family’s daughter also moved to a new house nearby. The private fireworks display they held was a way to celebrate both of these occasions.

“We always have a display on the 6th November for my granddaughter’s birthday. We’ve had a fireworks display every year since she was born – that’s 13 years!”

This had now become an important family tradition.

Participants also talked about traditions of hosting and going to fireworks displays, even if it did not necessarily mark an occasion. The main driver of this was a continued sense of tradition and nostalgia. Those hosting fireworks displays explained how it was important to continue this family tradition as it reminded them of their own childhoods; they wanted the same tradition and experience for their children.

“When you see a firework as a child it’s always very exciting, and you kind of have that feeling back.”

The smell of fireworks was often cited as triggering feelings of nostalgia reminding participants of their own childhood and being around family members.

Recalling experiences of previous fireworks events (public or private) was an important part of the experience for some. These participants enjoyed recalling the excitement they had felt as children in seeing fireworks or reminiscing about time they had spent with family at events.

"It was always a big kind of family thing, and I used to see my second cousins that I didn't see for years. You'd probably see them at a wedding or a funeral. But it was always a thing, every single year. Everyone used to look forward to going to my Auntie's house... she had the big back garden. My Uncle...used to always do the bonfire... it was the only time we saw our second cousins..."

Participants hoped that attending or hosting a fireworks display would evoke these memories and feelings. Those with children and grandchildren wished to create similar experiences and memories for the next generation. The reaction of children and grandchildren at events impacted the experience of the adults who were looking to see if their children/ grandchildren were enjoying themselves.

"You're... seeing these things through their eyes... it's nice to see their reaction... cheering them on, picking out the colours... it's just a different way of learning for them... a bit of life experience."

These elements of nostalgia also held true for those attending public displays in locations or areas where they had spent time in as a child, such as their school or recreation ground.

"It's nostalgic for me because of the place that it is. We used to have sports days there."

Fireworks displays were also seen as a time for an annual meeting of friends. A young friendship group explained to us that every year they would go to a fireworks display – either locally or further afield. Older participants also explained how, before they had children, they went to fireworks displays with friends.

Participants who attended Chinese New Year described it as; *"the best opportunity to meet the old friends who I have not seen for years."* Those who had invited friends to a private display at home noted that it had been a nice opportunity to see their friends.

"It was nice seeing friends round. You don't see people very often and it's nice to have them round for a little gathering... and have some food."

Participants attending public displays enjoyed the feel of people coming together to celebrate, particularly those attending smaller events.

"It felt more of a community really, was the vibe. It felt more family orientated, didn't feel like you were in a crowd amongst all strangers."

Our social media analytics also found that fireworks were important in engendering a community feel. Several top hashtags mentioned family, friends and community (e.g. #familytime, #familyfun). Posts on these topics mentioned local fireworks events, and opportunities to spend time with family and friends at fireworks displays.



Social media post

Brilliant #fireworks and #family time for us tonight 🌟🌟 there is A LOT of #communityspirit on our street and in our local area. That is rare – we are lucky here

This said, the quantitative survey found that fireworks were an important tradition for a minority of the GB population - a quarter (24%) of those surveyed agreed that they played an important role in their family's traditions.

The negative impact of fireworks

Across the research, the following factors emerged as important when considering the negative impact of fireworks:

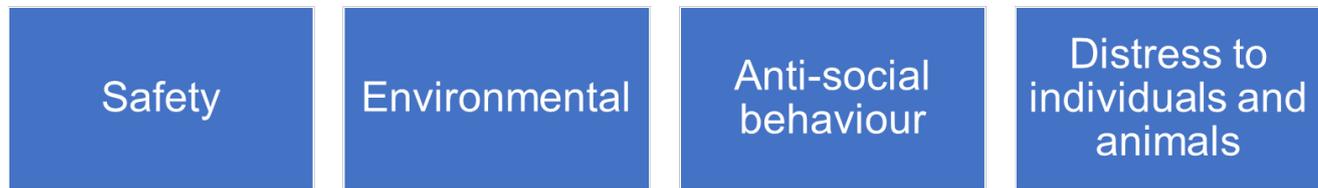


Figure 3.5: Negative impacts of fireworks – not ranked in any particular order

Safety

As a key theme that emerged during the research, chapter 5 explores attitudes towards safety at fireworks events in greater detail. Here we provide a brief overview of key points.

While a majority of survey participants hold positive attitudes towards fireworks, there are concerns regarding safety.

Safety concerns tend to focus on the use of fireworks by private individuals. As shown in Figure 3.3, almost half (49%) of those surveyed consider private fireworks displays to be unsafe. A third (36%) of those who had attended a private fireworks display within the last three years say they had been concerned for the safety of children at the event, while a similar proportion (32%) had been worried about the welfare of the person lighting the fireworks, and a fifth (21%) about their own personal safety. In contrast, the public expressed little concern regarding safety at organised public fireworks displays (just 14% consider them unsafe), and attendees at an event within the last three years tend not to have worried for their personal safety (14%) or the safety of children at the event (19%).

When conducting ethnographies of private fireworks displays, a range of safety behaviours were observed. These are further discussed in chapter 5. Participants reflected that there was always a margin for error when using fireworks and described their own experiences from years gone by.

Unsafe use of fireworks

One participant explained that, when at university, he attended a party where fireworks were set off in a small garden of roughly four-square meters. He said that at the time he knew this was dangerous. People started to point fireworks at others as a joke.

“People started pointing fireworks at people... there was just one lad... who was a little bit rogue... and people started lighting fireworks. I think people just got bored... so people started holding them and putting them up in the air... then someone stuck one somewhere... slightly more risqué and lit one off there. That could have been pretty bad.”

The participant felt that this event showed him how people could get carried away using fireworks and that they should be treated with care, especially when not supervised by professionals.

Having, or hearing about, dangerous fireworks experiences was a key reason why people did not like fireworks or did not attend displays at all.

Previous negative experiences of fireworks were also mentioned by qualitative participants who did not like and tried to avoid fireworks. Some described how they had been involved in an incident before – such as being hit in the head by a firework as a teenager. Others said they had heard stories from health professionals who said they had seen many fireworks injuries.

Participants also described hearing stories about dangerous use of fireworks or the impact of fireworks on people and animals in the media and on social media.

“I have seen it on the news, in the media about young teenagers firing rockets out of their cars trying to look cool or whatever they are trying to do. I have seen things like that and it just makes you think it can happen anywhere. Anyone can be affected by that, if you’re walking down the street.”

“Scrolling through Facebook. A lot of friends say their dogs are scared [of fireworks].”

Environmental

Participants from the qualitative research (both ethnographic interviews and interviews with those who did not like and avoided fireworks) cited the environmental impact of fireworks as a concern. When probed, they assumed that fireworks being lit released harmful chemicals into the atmosphere. They also raised concerns about litter being left after public displays.

Just over half of those surveyed (52%) agree that private fireworks displays are bad for the environment, with women expressing particular concern regarding the environmental impact of fireworks (57%). Overall, the environmental impact of public fireworks displays was slightly less of a concern, but still the main criticism, mentioned by two-fifths (44%) overall, and almost half (48%) of women. Attitudes reflect those noted in the Ipsos MORI Issues Index² where a rise in the environment as the most important issue facing Britain has been noted in the last ten years, particularly among women and younger age groups.

The environmental impact of fireworks was also raised across industry stakeholder interviews with mentions of looking towards replacing plastics used in the construction of fireworks with card.

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is most often associated with inappropriate use of fireworks by private individuals. Over half of those surveyed agree that private fireworks displays disturb the peace and quiet in their area (55%) whereas a third say the same of public fireworks displays (33%).

Within the quantitative survey, a fifth (20%) reported having experienced anti-social behaviour related to fireworks (either personally or through a friend or family member). 13% of those that had experienced anti-social behaviour said they had reported the behaviour to police. 7% had experienced property damage by fireworks: 4% had submitted an insurance claim as a result.

Some rejecters took particular issue with private events noting that these were more unpredictable, and open to unsafe fireworks use.

² <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/ipsos-mori-issues-index-january-2020>

Across the qualitative research participants noted that anti-social use of fireworks was a particular concern.

“The ones [use of fireworks] I object to are unsupervised young adults - in local areas - no regards for others, very loud bangs, frightening for animals.”

Concerns included fireworks being used by ‘kids’ and ‘teenagers’ who set off fireworks on the streets at unpredictable times, including in the middle of the night and even during the day. This was considered dangerous for people out and about during that time, and a noise disturbance for the local area.

“One time...there was a firework going that way [horizontally], not in a celebratory fashion...that was shocking to see that, just kids... [the firework] going really low, luckily I was in the house.”

Participants queried how young people were able to get hold of fireworks, suggesting that this should be made more difficult.

“It should be much harder to get hold of them. Teenagers just buy them and mess around with them.”

Experience of anti-social use of fireworks

One participant described her experience of anti-social use of fireworks during Hallowe'en. They had been walking in the local area with a friend who had her baby in a pram. They saw teenagers “messaging about” with fireworks, and one firework was set off in the direction of the pram.

“No harm was done but it was horrible.”

She felt that it should be made more difficult for people to buy fireworks and were concerned that teenagers were able to buy them from people re-selling fireworks on the street. Overall, she felt that anti-social use of fireworks had a negative impact on the community.

“It means it’s less safe and there’s more fear in the community around that time.”

Our social media analytics found that misuse of fireworks was also discussed online. However, very few online posts talked about individuals' specific experiences of fireworks misuse, and the majority instead highlighted general dangers of misusing fireworks. Most posts came from event organisers or police and fire services talking about preventative measures to minimise anti-social behaviour and misuse of fireworks or came from news sources reporting on instances of dangerous use.

Concerns regarding anti-social use of fireworks and the wider impact that this type of behaviour had on perceptions of the fireworks industry were cited by industry stakeholders.

“[We] always argue that anti-social use is not good. As an industry we’d like to see more authorities clamping down on that.”

Access to products banned in the UK from Europe, and illegal sales of fireworks were seen as key issues with anti-social fireworks use. Stakeholders felt that although laws were in place to limit anti-social behaviour, such as a 9pm curfew, police were not always able to enforce them.

“The enforcers (police and fire brigade) at the current time cannot cope, or don’t have the resources or knowledge to cope.”

Stakeholders further felt that where enforcement was carried out, reporting this would help demonstrate to the public that actions were being taken.

“Laws are there already but they’re not being enforced as rigorously as they could be and then this enforcement action is not being published. So the public impression is that this is going on and that nothing is getting done about it.”

Further views regarding rules and regulations are discussed in chapter 6.

Distress to individuals and animals

Participants from the qualitative research who did not like, and avoided fireworks explained how the noise created by fireworks was problematic for pets, children and those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or anxiety. Within the quantitative survey, two-thirds (61%) of pet owners say private fireworks displays disturb the peace and quiet in their local area.

Those who had pets reported that their dogs would cry and shake at the sound of fireworks. There was also mention of the impact on livestock with the owner asking surrounding neighbours not to set off fireworks fearful that the noise would spook them and trigger them to run away. Participants across the research also referred to social media posts about animals becoming upset by the noise of fireworks. These concerns were acknowledged by industry stakeholders although there were differing views regarding the extent to which fireworks impacted animals. Stakeholders also felt that people notifying neighbours in advance of their displays would help them plan for animals’ wellbeing during a fireworks display.

Participants who did not like fireworks also explained that children could become upset when fireworks were set off. In some cases, they did not like loud bangs and wanted to stay inside during fireworks season. The noise of fireworks also triggered PTSD among some participants who had served in the army or had general anxiety. Our social media analytics also demonstrated that people thought fireworks could negatively impact people’s mental health. Some posts highlighted the triggering effect that firework displays could have for those with PTSD and others discussed the stress that they caused to people with autism.



News website comment

Not just animals, what about people with autism? What about ex-soldiers with PTSD associated with flashing lights and loud bangs? What about people who suffer photo-sensitive epilepsy brought on by flashing lights. Lots of people are affect by fireworks. Not just animals.

Participants who did not like and tried to avoid fireworks had a range of coping mechanisms for the variety of issues caused by fireworks. For pets, participants felt that it was not fair to sedate their pets for fireworks and felt that putting them under blankets and giving them treats were not effective. One participant had looked on the RSPCA website for guidance and would use calming tablets.

“The dog will just cower down underneath the table. Whenever I see that week around the fireworks, I have the radio to try and drown out the noise. The dog would bark and bark and bark. We can tell it upsets him.”

Participants provided emotional support by sitting and holding their children and pets during these times.

“The best thing for my dog is me being close by.”

Dog and cat owners stroked their pets to calm them down and some talked about staying at home as much as possible during fireworks season to avoid the loud noises and to comfort children and pets.

Pet dog distressed by fireworks

One participant who disliked and avoided fireworks described their experience with their pet dog when fireworks were being used in their local area. She felt that fireworks were an issue during Bonfire season and took a number of steps to make sure her dog did not become too distressed during this time.

Walking her dog during this time caused some anxiety, as she was unsure whether fireworks might be set-off unexpectedly.

“I might out on a walk with the dog - if one goes off unexpectedly then God knows where my dog will end up.”

In the run-up to Bonfire night, she took a number of steps. This included giving the dog medication which she did a few days before and after Bonfire night. She also aimed to be in the house during this time so that she could sit with her dog and comfort it. On hearing fireworks, the dog would hide under the sofa, cry and shake.

“I feel angry about the effects on my pet - third member of [the] family.”

Participants with children and pets who became distressed by fireworks, as well as those who themselves became distressed through anxiety or PTSD, described planning for when there would be fireworks events in the local area. They would research or keep an eye out for information about when events would be happening, so they could be prepared.

“I look into any local shows that are around my house, my area but then again they could go off at any time with the local neighbours. I do tend to research because that’s when they’ll be more loud bangs and stuff. It could happen at any time really.”

However, participants acknowledged that this was not possible for private displays and reflected on the unpredictability of when fireworks could be used. This was particularly the case when fireworks were set off at seemingly random times in the year – for example, not Bonfire Night or New Year’s Eve. This meant participants could not plan for fireworks being set off to put things in place to help themselves, their children or their pets.

Participants described using a white noise machine, using headphones or turning up the TV and radio to a loud volume to distract themselves and block out the noise of fireworks.

Child worried about fireworks

A parent described how one of their children was anxious around fireworks. Whilst the other child enjoyed attending public events, the other found this worrying.

“[He] gets quite worked up at the thought of going to it [an event].”

One parent would stay at home with their son if the other family members were going to a fireworks display. Their son associated fireworks with fire, noise and potential danger.

“He’s a sensitive wee boy, a worrier. He sees it as fire and bangs so he’d be worrying about things catching fire. He thinks too much about it, not just the noise, but things that could happen...what if the fireworks comes down on somebody else?”

Living in a small village, anti-social use of fireworks by teenagers was a particular concern, with their son feeling anxious when he heard fireworks. During these times they used a white noise machine to cancel out the noise.

Fireworks and anxiety

One participant described how they felt anxious around fireworks. As a child they had not enjoyed fireworks displays, disliking the noise and feeling scared.

“I just remember the loud noises and just being scared that it would hurt me.”

As someone with anxiety, they found the noise of fireworks particularly concerning, leading them to wonder whether they had heard a firework or something else.

“I suffer with anxiety so I just get...probably more scared and anxious than other people do. Particularly for me it’s the unknown. So if I’m not expecting a firework to go off or a loud bang to happen then it probably scares me a little more than anyone else. I think, what if that wasn’t a firework? Where can I go to get away from this thing what if it wasn’t a firework?”

They noted that fireworks going off during unsociable hours could impact on their sleep, and that this tended to happen in the run-up to Bonfire Night as well as the weeks after.

“It’s not just on Bonfire Night it’s always the two weeks leading up and the two weeks after. It’s just constant fireworks. Keeps me up at night when they are going off at 12 at night or in the morning.”

Knowing to expect fireworks in the local area was important, although the participants recognised that this was not always possible. They looked out for this information, so they could prepare for this by trying to make things at home as comfortable as possible.

“I’d probably say when you know that it’s going to happen, prepare yourself, have a nice meal at home make yourself comfortable at home, put the TV on to drown it out as much as you can. When you don’t know it’s going to happen, just think to yourself well I’ll just go home now...if it scares you that much or makes you anxious just go inside just be with someone is my advice, be with someone - that calms me down a lot.”

Attending fireworks events (experiences and behaviours)

Synopsis: This chapter explores experiences of attending both organised public and private fireworks events.

Key findings

Two fifths (41%) of survey participants have attended an organised public firework display within the last three years, a quarter within the last year (25%).

Organised public displays are most popular amongst younger people or family groups.

Participants enjoyed things in addition to fireworks at organised public displays, including bonfires, food, drink, music and rides although poor weather could impact on these.

Reactions to fireworks at organised public displays were varied. Participants enjoyed taking part in collective 'oohs' and 'aahs' but some became bored. This was particularly where there were pauses between fireworks, a perceived lack of crescendo to the display, and when children became distracted.

A sixth (17%) of those surveyed had attended a private fireworks display within the last three years. Bonfire Night was the most common reason for the display (64%), and private displays were most popular amongst young people and families.

Fireworks are more likely to be purchased by men than women and are typically purchased from a supermarket. Once bought, two-fifths (43%) of people store fireworks in the house, a fifth (20%) in the garage and a sixth (15%) in the shed. Participants noted that their storage location was chosen as it was inaccessible to pets and children, and a dry and cold environment.

Emotions around private displays were mixed. Whilst some participants in the ethnographic interviews expressed anxiety about the potential impact on pets and neighbours, there was a sense of anticipation and excitement. Private displays were interactive with shared responses to fireworks and laughter.

Traditional gender roles were often adopted during private displays, with men taking responsibility for setting off fireworks, and women taking responsibility for childcare and refreshments. Observations from the ethnography are reflected in the quantitative survey, with men more likely than women to report having lit fireworks during their lifetime.

Organised public fireworks displays

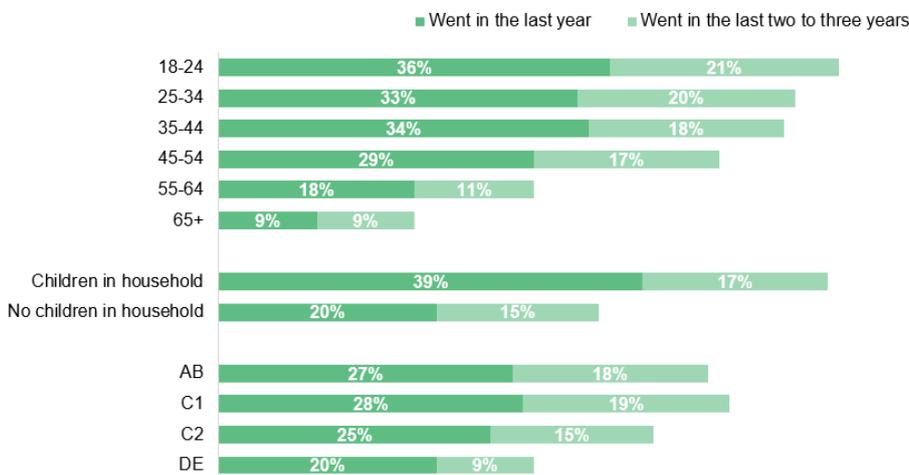
Within the quantitative survey organised public fireworks displays are defined as 'displays open to large numbers of people, either ticketed, to raise money through donations, or for free. They may be run by a professional company or a local organisation'.

Attendee profile and reason for attendance

Two fifths (41%) of survey participants have attended an organised public fireworks display within the last three years, a majority within the last year (25%). Most commonly, the event had been held to celebrate Bonfire Night (87%); a minority report having attended a public event for any other reason (New Year's Eve 14%, Christmas 4%, Diwali 3% and Chinese New Year 1%).

Organised public fireworks displays are most popular among younger, more affluent or family groups (see Figure 4.1). There are no significant differences in attendance by region.

Those aged 18-24 are most likely to report having gone to an event with friends, while those aged 25 or over are more likely to have gone with family. Among those aged 35 and above the likelihood of attending an event increased significantly with the presence of children in the household.



Base: All participants (1,969)

Figure 4.1: Attendees at organised public fireworks displays

Experiences of attending an organised public event

A majority of survey participants that have attended an organised public fireworks display report enjoying both the display itself, and the event overall (95%).

Across the ethnographic research, experiences of attending a public event tended to focus on four key themes, as shown in the diagram below.

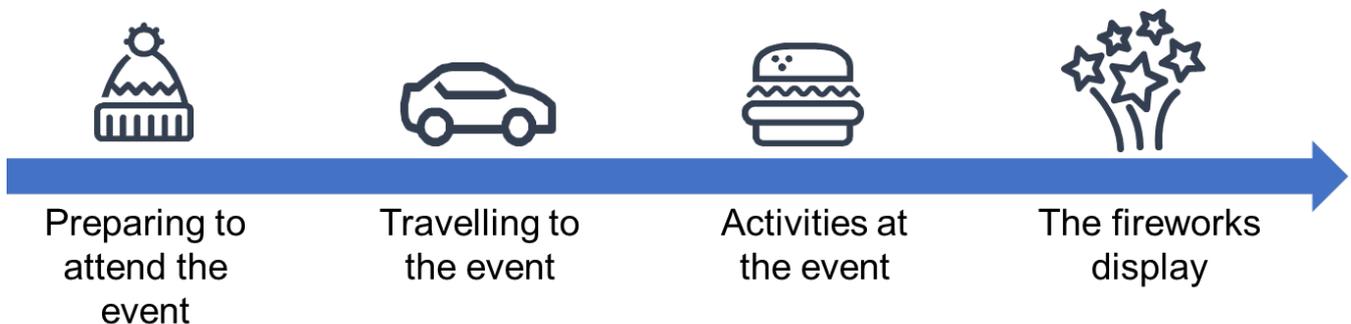


Figure 4.2: Attending a public event

Preparing to attend the event

Participants from the ethnographic research had certain rituals and behaviours when attending public fireworks displays. Getting ready for the display was similar across households. Participants anticipated cold weather and dressed to be comfortable in cold, and sometimes wet, weather.

“Good job this coat’s big as I’ve got that many layers on underneath.”

Parents were particularly concerned with wrapping children up warm. They also considered safety when dressing their children, explaining that tucking jeans into boots prevented sparks from going in.

“I’ll be wearing a coat, but for “the kids it will be the hat, the scarf, the gloves.”

Travelling to the event

Those attending an organised public display travelled to the events in different ways, including on the bus, by car and walking to their local village green. Good journeys tended to be short walks to a display as it avoided the stress of being late or stuck in traffic. Bad journeys involved unpredictability. One family expected to get the London underground, but the service was cancelled. This meant they had to double their journey time by getting a bus with a young child.

Activities at the event

Participants enjoyed aspects of the event as well as the fireworks at displays, including bonfires, food, drink, music and rides. Before the event, they expected to be able to purchase burgers, hot dogs, sweets, beer and wine. In most cases they were not disappointed. However, there were instances where very wet weather, long queues and high prices deterred them.

Music was also a feature of participants’ public display experiences. Those driving in the car listened to music on the way to the event, sometimes singing along to the radio. When at the event, there was background music coming from speakers or individual stalls. Public event goers were keen for fireworks to be set off in time to music noting that this added to the impact of the fireworks. However, most organised public events attended did not use music along with the fireworks display.

Public display attendees thought bonfires were a crucial part of the evening because it had historic significance and engendered a sense of nostalgia. This was also felt to be a calming element of the evening, juxtaposed to the bangs of the fireworks.

“I think it’s beautiful... it’s like something someone would do in the woods. It reminds me of Robin Hood... the fire would have been no different 5,000 years ago.”

The fireworks display

Participants felt a sense of anticipation before the display. They checked the time in the lead up to the display, were keen for the weather to be nice and wanted everything to run smoothly.

“I’m very nervous... I’m just hoping that it stops raining, and that they start on time.”

Reactions to the displays were varied. Participants took part in the typical “ooh’s and aah’s” together. They were especially happy to be at an event where everyone was focusing on the same thing. Parents were happy when their children enjoyed the fireworks. Parents also appreciated a range of colours and noises themselves and were keen for displays to build up into a crescendo.

“I like it when there’s multiple explosions of different colours.”

There were also negative reactions to fireworks displays. Participants could become bored during a fireworks display. Some felt that the display went on for too long and started checking their phones or their watches to see when it would finish. Participants would also start chatting to one another, wondering how long the display would last, how many people had attended or whether they were ready to think about going home.

Children could also get bored, especially when there were long pauses between fireworks. They would be distracted by other things, jumping in puddles, counting stars and pointing out airplanes to their parents who were trying to focus on the display.

Child: “Mum, how long?” Mum: “I don’t know. How long’s a piece of string? Just enjoy...”

Children getting bored

We observed one of our participant’s children at a fireworks display becoming bored and restless. They chanted over and over again in the crowd:

“I want to go home! I want to go home! I want to go home!”

The parents were visibly embarrassed by their child and quickly exited the event. They had been keen for both of their children to experience a fireworks display.

“I want them to see if they can enjoy it. We tried it, it never went as well as we’d hoped but we’ll go back to the drawing board.”

They reflected that their children may be too young to enjoy the event suggesting that they would wait until the children were aged over 5 years old before going to another event. However, they did wonder if a small area at the event could have been provided for people watching the display with young children, making it easier for them to watch the display.

“I don’t think it would be such a bad idea to have a little section...for people...with smaller kids.”

A young couple attending a local fireworks display enjoyed the bonfire and the event in general. However, towards the end of the display, they became bored.

“I’m over it. Shall we leave?”

When bored, spectators could become disappointed. Pauses between fireworks suggested that the display had ended, but then it would start slowly again. This was particularly frustrating for spectators who wanted a build up to a crescendo. In one case, a father was disappointed that the penultimate firework was not as noisy as he had expected.

“It was just sparkly and colourful. I thought it would be noisy.”

Younger participants used social media to document their experiences of public fireworks displays. However, participants often forgot to take photos of the experience and some were then disappointed not to have documented their evening. Those who did, used Snapchat, a family WhatsApp group and Instagram.

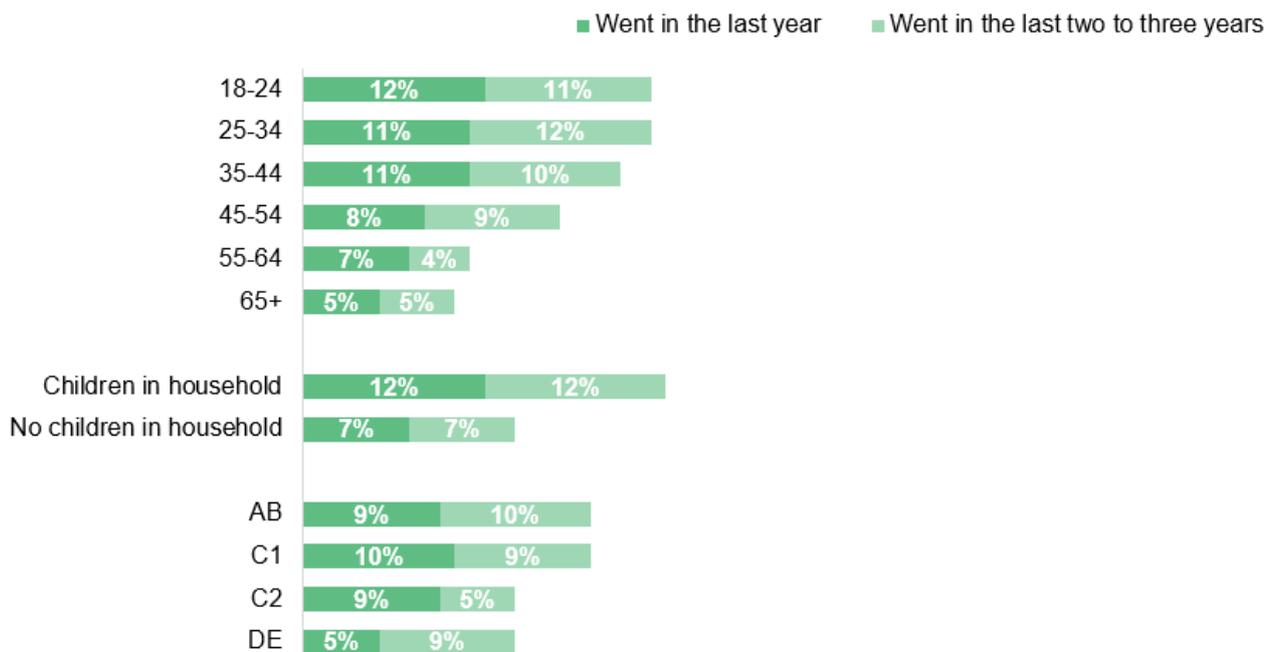
Private fireworks displays

Within the quantitative survey, private fireworks displays were defined as an event ‘organised by people for their friends and/or family, for example in their back garden or at a private party. They might mark special occasions like Bonfire Night, Diwali, New Year’s Eve or Chinese New Year, or they might be for private celebrations like a birthday or wedding’.

Attendee profile and reason for attendance

Just a sixth (17%) of survey participants had attended a private fireworks display within the last three years. As with public events, Bonfire Night was the most common reason for the display (64%). Other reasons included New Year’s Eve (28%), a birthday, wedding or anniversary (18%), Christmas (5%), Diwali (4%), or Chinese New Year (1%).

Like public fireworks displays, younger, affluent or family groups are most likely to have attended a private display within the last three years (see Figure 4.3). Those aged 18-24 years old tend to have gone in friendship groups, while those aged 25 or over are more likely to report having gone with family. As with public fireworks display, among those aged 35 and above the likelihood of having attended an event increases with the presence of children in the household.



Base: All participants (1,969)

Figure 4.3: Attendees at private fireworks displays

Host profile and reason for display

Just 7% of survey participants had hosted a private fireworks display within the last three years. Most often the event had been held to celebrate Bonfire Night (70%). Three in ten (30%) had hosted a display for New Year's Eve, while 14% had done so to celebrate an alternative event such as a birthday, wedding or anniversary.

Hosts were most likely to be affluent (social class AB), aged 35-44 and to have children in the household.

Experiences of hosting a private event

Across the ethnographic research, experiences of hosting a private event were varied but tended to focus on four key themes, as shown in the diagram below. Compared with public events, these tend to start earlier (with practical preparations), while of course the travel is a less important part.

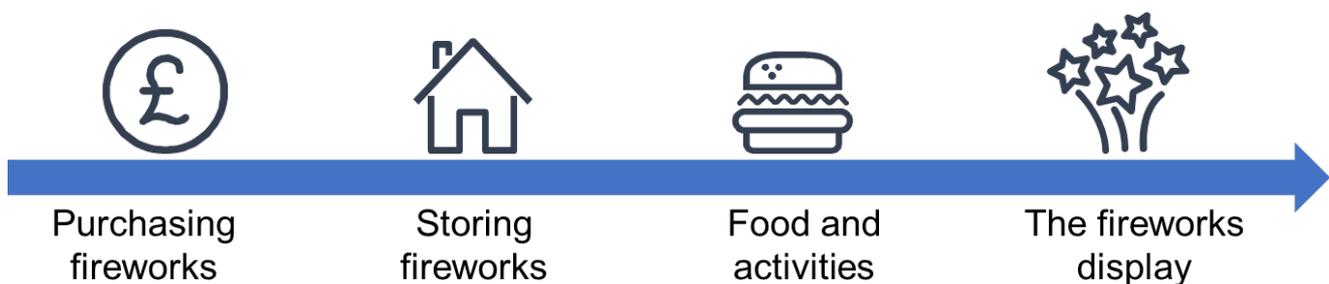


Figure 4.4: Hosting a private event

Purchasing fireworks

Two-fifths (43%) of those surveyed report having ever purchased fireworks. Men are more likely than women to have purchased fireworks (48% and 37% respectively) as are more affluent groups (SEG AB). The likelihood of purchasing also decreases with age.

Those of our survey participants who had purchased fireworks had most often done so from a large supermarket (46%), while a minority (18%) had visited an independent seller or fireworks shop (13%).

Participants in our ethnographic research who hosted a private fireworks display typically bought their fireworks from supermarkets – although they knew they could also find them in catalogues and on the internet. They were also aware that some off-licences sold fireworks and on occasions, white vans outside of pubs or on the side of the road. Purchase decision-making was driven by convenience and trust, meaning supermarkets were an ideal place to pick them up along with the weekly shop. Although firework buyers thought the internet was convenient, it was not trusted.

Buying from a trusted source

One participant bought fireworks for Diwali. He preferred to buy from a supermarket than buy online. He explained that if fireworks came from a large chain supermarket, they are more likely to have been through testing than fireworks bought from eBay. He also explained the importance of the BSI kitemark.

“Ultimately, if you're a supermarket you're not going to sell stuff that's just been imported in without going through any tests...”

His main concern with buying on the internet was that fireworks could be unsafe.

“As long as someone has had a look at it to make sure it's not going to blow up in my face as I'm lighting it...”

Participants decided which fireworks to buy based on the type of firework they wanted, what they had used before, quieter fireworks for those with children and, for those with pets, the extent to which they were pet-friendly.

“A couple of rockets, starburst, fountains. I didn't bother with bangers... cos the very loud ones I don't like anyway... They'd give you a heart attack. So mainly the ones with just a nice display, nice colours...”

Another important factor when buying fireworks was price. Participants recognised that the price of fireworks varied, with some larger options described as “super expensive”. They recalled family members spending nearly £600 on fireworks.

“I'm sure people spend excessive amounts. It's probably a show of wealth as well. The more money you can burn the richer you are.”

People within families had differing views on how much should be spent on fireworks. In one case, a woman did not want to spend more than £35 because she thought that was what an average family would spend. However, her partner said he would spend up to £150 if he had the money.

It was rare that survey participants who had ever purchased fireworks said they spent over £50. The majority (75%) report having spent between £1 and £49, while 15% say they had spent £50 or over. Those who had hosted a display in the last 3 years spent more, with half (54%) reporting that they spent £49 or less, and two-fifths (44%) reporting that they spent £50 or over.

Industry stakeholders noted that spend across consumers varied. They felt that some consumers shopped around, looking for offers and deals. Stakeholders reflected that the cost of fireworks to consumers were largely influenced by the cost of manufacturing and transportation costs to transport fireworks from China to the UK.

Storing fireworks

Just a sixth (15%) of survey participants who had bought fireworks stored them in a shed, while two-fifths (43%) stored them in their house and a fifth (20%) in their garage.

Once purchased, ethnographic participants stored fireworks in many different places, including their garage, dining room, the bath, garden shed, and car boot. For the most part, they wanted to store fireworks away from children and pets, somewhere cold, dry, and out of the way. Participants weren't quite sure where they received these guidelines from. Some remembered seeing them on the packet. Others recalled adverts from the 1980s.

“I remember years ago people would take them out of the packaging and put them in a tin... and there used to be a fireworks health and safety advert in the 80s. 'Store your fireworks in a tin'”

However, some approached storage differently noting that fireworks should be stored somewhere damp, so they didn't catch light.

Storing fireworks at home

One participant from our ethnographic research bought a pack of fireworks ready to set off for her nephew's birthday. She seemed unsure about what the best practice for storing fireworks was. She decided to store them in the bath. Her logic was that the cat would not go in there and scratch at the fuse and they would be in less danger of catching fire in a damp place. She had the fireworks wrapped in a blanket before the display. On the day of the display, she removed the blanket.



In other cases, participants had intentions of storing fireworks in a dry place but forgot the impact of everyday household activities. One participant explained that their dining room was a good place to store the fireworks because it was dry. However, she had her damp washing hanging up just over where the fireworks were kept.

Food and activities

Ethnographic participants hosting private displays considered what else they would provide as part of the event. Most planned to provide food and drink for their guests with a mix of home-prepared and take-away foods arranged across the events. This was an important part of bringing together friends and family.

The fireworks display

Emotions in the lead-up to the display varied. Some were anxious about hosting displays, this was particularly noted amongst women. They either did not like the noise or were concerned about the potential impact fireworks would have on their pets and neighbours.

Concern for neighbours

One participant was worried about how her neighbours would react to her family hosting a fireworks display in their garden. She was aware that a neighbour had been posting negative comments about fireworks, and their impact on pets on social media. This had led her to consider whether she should notify her neighbours of her planned display.

"I have been thinking all week...do I do a little print-out and post it to all my neighbours...to let them know what I'm doing and then I thought no!...and then I didn't want a backlash and it'll probably be over in half an hour, 40 minutes and it'll be done."

She was also concerned, because she could not recall a time when her neighbours had themselves set off any fireworks.

Those who were anxious about hosting the display made a conscious effort to appear happy, as they were concerned about worrying their children. One mother felt it was important that her children had a positive experience and liked fireworks going forward.

"I don't like the loud noise of fireworks but I enjoy the lights but I don't want to pass that on to the kids so I suppose I need to let them experience it."

In contrast, others expressed great excitement noting that the build up to the display, particularly for children, was like Christmas.

"It's the same thing as Christmas. You're look forward to opening the presents. It's just looking forward to letting them off and going 'ooh'."

Parents also became excited, especially those who had bought and chosen the fireworks and intended to set them off themselves. Typically, this was a father in the household. Dads also became excited at public displays and sought to excite the children.

Our ethnographic research showed that private displays were more interactive than public displays, with the viewers engaging with the person setting them off and having a more animated reaction. Typically, the person lighting the fireworks would stand in the garden on some grass and the viewers would stand nearer to the door to the house or on a patio. In one case, the family lit fireworks out on a communal garden away from the house. One family also said that if the weather turned bad, the children could watch the fireworks from inside.

The atmosphere at private fireworks displays was distinctly more raucous than at public displays despite the fact that private displays were quieter and smaller than at public ones. Spectators were far more engaged with the event, which meant more cheering – typically aimed at the person lighting the fireworks. Further, participants often jeered the person lighting the fireworks if the bangs were quiet or small. This was a great source of amusement for the spectators.

"That was a small one. Your fireworks are small (LAUGHTER)."

Laughter was a key feature of private displays. There were also examples of participants laughing at potentially dangerous situations. In one case, a young man lit a firework in his local estate. He did not adhere to instructions and was unsure on how it should be set off. When the firework went off, he did not see where it went. This was amusing for him and the spectator.

"Where did that go? Did it go on the balcony?" (LAUGHTER)."

Other participants found the setting off of fireworks exciting and adrenalin pumping although they noted the potential for something to go wrong.

"I can get stressed out if I'm lighting one of these ... thinking I don't want to catch on fire... at this level it's fine... if it's anything it probably would be first or second degree burns if anything goes wrong with these but I can imagine third degree burns going wrong with an £80 rocket."

Spectators also reacted with adrenalin and excitement when fireworks went off.

Those lighting fireworks were keen to show off their "grand finale". In one case, the firework lighter fired two rockets before the final larger one, which got noisier towards the end. His family were all very impressed by this. They cheered and clapped loudly.

Gender roles at private events

Within the quantitative survey, only men, and those who had hosted a private display, express confidence in lighting fireworks. Over half (59%) of men say they would be at least fairly confident lighting fireworks, while three-quarters (72%) of hosts feel the same. Women are less confident, with just a fifth (22%) saying they would be comfortable lighting fireworks.

Hosts are most likely to report having lit fireworks at the event (63%). Men also tend to have been the ones to light fireworks, and the likelihood of lighting fireworks increases with age.

Traditional gender roles were a feature of the ethnographic research. Participants spoke about how mum and dad had different roles when hosting a fireworks display. The dad would set off the fireworks and the mum would take care of the food and ensure the children were looked after. Participants often recognised these roles.

“My dad would do the fireworks, my mum would cook up the burgers, the sausages, some finger food.”

Men in the families also noted that they could get carried away with the display. Their partners noticed this and identified it as a gendered trait.

“I’m not going to gender stereotype... but I do tend to think that from a men’s point of view... it quickly goes from a little bit of fun with a couple of sparklers and a couple of fountains to letting off some serious fireworks.”

Men were often congratulated for lighting the fireworks, often clapped and cheered during and after the display.

“Don’t you think Daddy’s doing an amazing job?” Child: “yeah!”

Safety at events

Synopsis: This chapter explores the experiences of safety amongst those who recently attended organised public and private events, and views on who is responsible for ensuring safe use of fireworks in the UK.

Key findings

A minority of people who have attended a public fireworks display in the last 3 years are concerned about safety for themselves (14%) or children in their group (19%)

Those who attended organised public displays were reassured about the safety of the event by: assumption that there are experts involved, making safety-driven decisions; use of large venues reflecting numbers attending; enforcement of barriers to maintain public distance from fireworks/ bonfires; security checks on entrance; and visibility of stewards.

Safety concerns are higher for private events, with a third (36%) of survey participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last 3 years expressing concern for the safety of those lighting the fireworks, and a similar proportion (32%) expressing concern for children at the event.

Participants lighting fireworks at privately held events exercised caution by looking at the distance between the fireworks and observers trying to maximise this. However, there were mixed reactions amongst family members regarding different approaches to lighting fireworks (not using a taper), lighting more than one firework at a time and returning to fireworks. Some expressed concern about this.

Safety of children at private events was a key consideration, with adults placing strict rules on where children should stand to observe the fireworks and providing guidance about use of sparklers.

Survey participants feel that people who organise displays (55%), manufacture fireworks (53%) and individuals who use fireworks (51%) have the most responsibility for how safely fireworks are used in the UK. Those who have hosted their own private display place more responsibility on people who organise displays and individuals whilst those who have had negative experiences of fireworks place more responsibility on local government and retailers.

Industry stakeholders noted the challenge of ensuring that consumers read instructions and suggest that a national, government-led campaign could improve public education.

Safety at organised public events

It was rare for survey participants that had attended public fireworks displays to express concerns about safety at the event (see Figure 5.1³). A minority said they were concerned for the safety of themselves (14%) or children in their group (19%).

³ Being injured by a firework yourself asked of all attendees to public events (802) and children in your group being injured by a firework asked of participants who have attended a public display in the last 3 years with children (414)

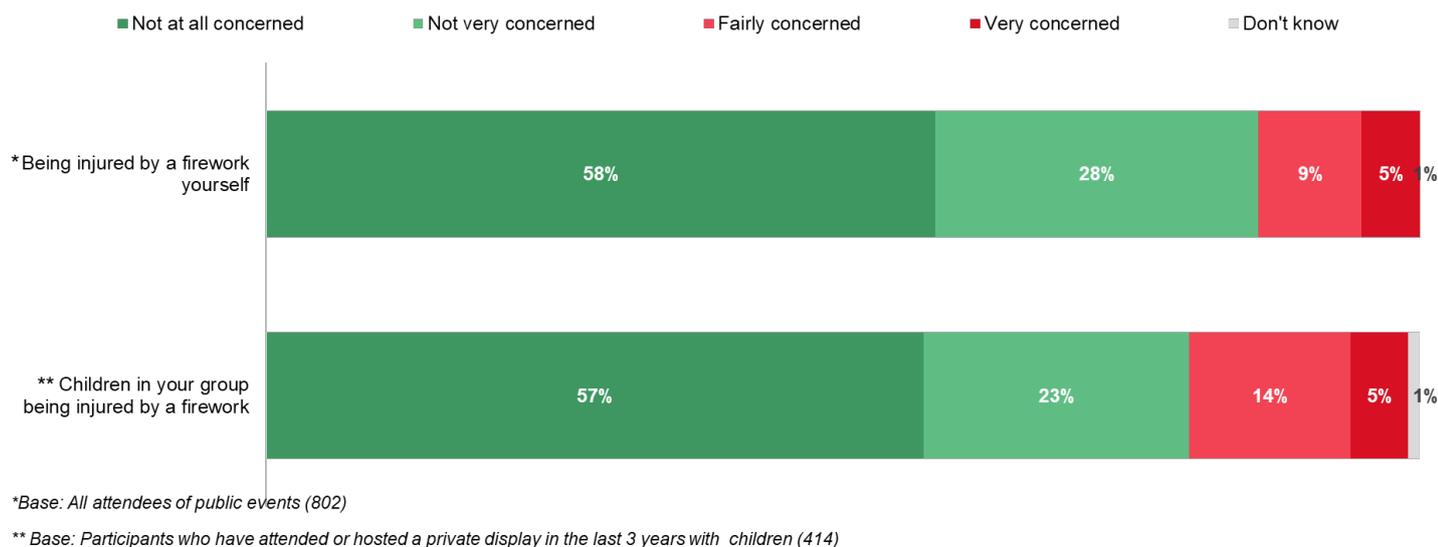


Figure 5.1: Safety concerns among organised public display attendees

Across the ethnographic research, participants who attended a public display cited a number of safety precautions that were put in place and reassured them about the safety of the event. These included:

- Events taking place in large venues that reflected the number of people attending such as parks or football pitches.
- Members of the public being kept back from bonfires and the fireworks display area. This included the use of barriers. Some participants purposely chose to stand towards the back of the crowd assembled to watch the display. This was based on safety of being away from a crowd (especially for those with young children), being away from any debris that might fall and standing further away from the noise.
- Security checks on entrance including rules on no alcohol or sparklers.
- Stewards in high-visibility jackets.

Participants also anticipated that a public display would put in place further safety measures such as presence of first aiders and access to emergency services. The role of experts was considered particularly important. Participants anticipated that experts would be planning for and managing the event and display and trusted that they would be making safety-driven decisions.

“Everything was observed safety-wise, distance-wise... you know cordoned off areas. It just felt safe. You couldn't even take your own sparklers... it just felt safe.”

Whilst participants trusted that events would be run safely, they still felt it was important to be personally vigilant. This was particularly the case amongst those who had personally, or who heard of accidents at fireworks displays. For example, one participant described how a family member had been hit on the head by a firework 15 years ago and that this always made them mindful of safety around fireworks.

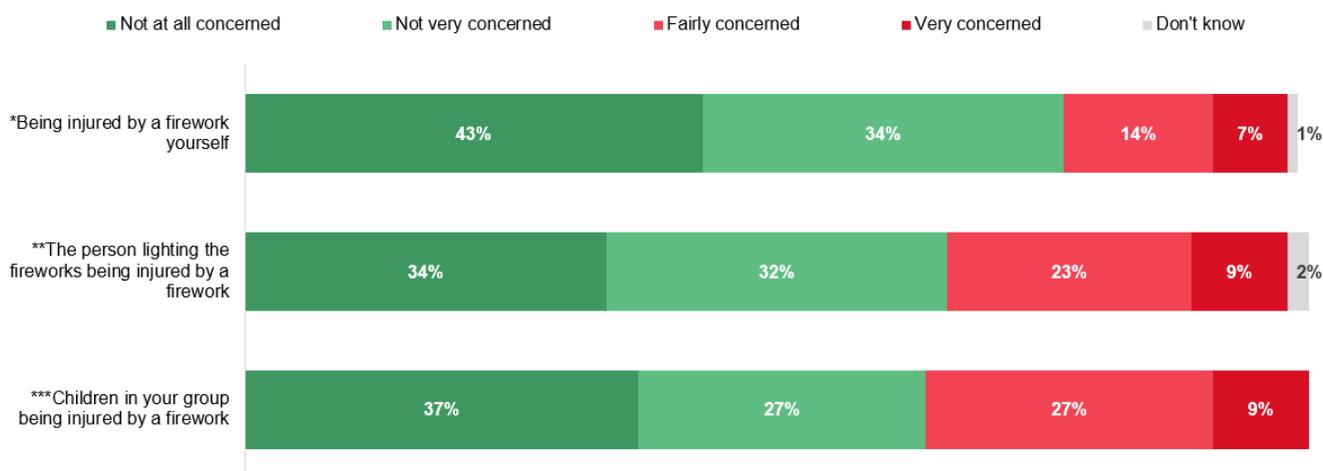
During the organised public displays attended across the ethnographic interviews there were a couple of situations where participants queried certain aspects of safety. One was related to a firework that did not appear to fire directly into the sky, but instead towards a bonfire. A second one was related to fuel being poured onto a bonfire which was struggling during wet weather. In both of these instances, participants felt reassured that they were some distance away from the fireworks display and bonfire.

At public events, parents with young children were concerned about keeping their child safe in a large crowd. Here, safety focused on keeping the child with them. This was not always easy in muddy fields and where children were keen to run around. It was clear across the ethnographic interviews that parents found this stressful, looking for a space where they could safely stand with their children - and let them run around - was not easy.

“It’s about crowd density. Try keeping a kid on your shoulders for an hour so they’re not running around. When you’ve got a young child, it’s a big worry.”

Safety at private events

While those survey participants who had recently attended a private display are generally not concerned about safety at the event (see Figure 5.2⁴), a higher proportion express concern regarding their personal safety and the safety of children and others when compared against attendees at public displays.



*Base: Participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last 3 years (374)

** Base: Participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last 3 years and did not light fireworks (236)

*** Base: Participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last 3 years with children (247)

Figure 5.2: Safety concerns among private display attendees

Participants taking part in the ethnographic research thought safety was a priority for enjoying a fireworks display. However, there was a spectrum of how safe participants made their private fireworks displays. Across the ethnographic interviews amongst private hosts, there was little use of instructions that came with fireworks. Participants did not feel they needed to read these as they felt they knew what they needed to do. This was particularly the case for participants who were keen to adopt perceived traditional gender roles (feeling that men and Dads did not read instructions).

⁴ Being injured by a firework yourself asked of all attendees to private events (374); children in your group being injured by a fireworks asked of participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last three years with children (247); the person lighting the fireworks being injured by a firework asked of participants who have attended or hosted a private display in the last three years and did not light any fireworks (236).

“Being a Dad... you don't really want to be doing instruction manuals for fireworks with your kids, because ultimately, it's light the fuse and go...it's [light fireworks at] arm's length. I think as we grew up we learnt that. Never go back to a firework. It's all the advertising you used to see when you were younger... and I just based it on that.”

The following elements of carrying out a private fireworks display were observed and discussed across the ethnographic interviews:

- **Distance from fireworks:** participants considered where in their garden they would light fireworks, and where those watching would stand, with the greatest distance between the two seen as the preferable option. Participants also considered the positioning of trees and garden furniture (e.g. trampolines) that could be damaged by fireworks.
- **Placing of fireworks:** participants displayed a mix of behaviours around placing fireworks before they were lit to avoid them falling over. This included: lighting the fuse whilst in the house and taking the firework outside to let off; balancing fireworks on the ground or garden furniture (e.g. BBQ) in the garden; using a flowerpot filled with soil; making a shallow dip in the ground to stand the firework in.
- **Lighting the fireworks:** participants often lit fireworks using a lighter rather than the provided taper, finding it more effective although not always easy.

“I've burnt my thumb again, as every year. I've got to find a lighter that puts a big jet up.”

Garden lighting, torches and mobile phones were all used as sources of light when preparing and lighting fireworks. Torches and mobile phones were not always considered easy to use when lighting fireworks. Some participants described preparing fireworks or laying out fireworks in advance, so they could do this with more light, then turning off lights to provide a dark background for the fireworks themselves.

Lighting fireworks in the dark

One participant described the difficulties in having enough light when setting-off fireworks. Whilst there was a garden light available, he felt that complete darkness would provide a better background for seeing and appreciating the fireworks themselves.

“It's this catch 22 around safety. Do I have that on [garden light] so I can see what I'm doing or do I ... switch it off ... and then I'm working in the pitch black ... where I've then got matches in one hand and a torch in the other...?”

- **Number of fireworks lit at once:** there were mixed behaviours regarding the number of fireworks lit at once, where they were stored between lighting fireworks. Some participants kept unused fireworks in their shed or away from where they were lighting fireworks between each firework being let off. Others put out a few fireworks in one go and then lit them one at a time or two at a time. Those who lit two fireworks at a time felt that the impact of two going off at once was more impressive.

“See your dad likes to do doubles at a time and that worries me sometimes.”

- **Returning to fireworks:** participants were mindful of whether a firework had completely gone out before they went back to light the next one. Reflecting survey findings, that people were particularly concerned about the safety of those lighting the fireworks, family members often shouted out for their Dad to “wait” before going to light the next firework.
- **Tidying up:** participants left used fireworks in the garden for collection when they had become cold.

Safety of **children** - as seen in the survey - was also a concern. Children were reminded to keep a distance from where the fireworks were being set-off and sometimes asked to observe from indoors. Where children moved out of the dedicated area for observers they were reprimanded.

“We always make sure the kids are safe... that the fireworks are at a distance that we know nobody’s going to get hurt.”

Safety of children

During one private display, our researchers observed a young child becoming very excited while his father set up the fireworks on the lawn in his back garden. The child began jumping up and down laughing while his mother held him back on their garden patio.

As the child’s father started to bring out the matches to light the fireworks, the child broke free and ran to where the fireworks had been set up. When this happened, the child’s mother screamed his name and insisted that the child should go to bed.

The child’s mother was visibly upset by this incident which she later said had stuck in her mind for the entire evening. This experience also impacted the father’s evening. He had hoped that his child would enjoy the display and worried that the incident had limited the extent to which he was able to do so.

“I liked the reaction of (my child to the fireworks) a couple of times but... if (my child) is being silly it’s upsetting (my wife)...I’m not only worried about that I’m also worried about the stress it’s causing. Then she wants to take him to bed. Then I feel upset cos he’s not getting the enjoyment he would have liked out of it.”

Sparkler safety was also mentioned by parents who reminded children to be careful. Some parents told children to put used sparklers in a pot/ a specific area of the garden and others put sparklers in carrots for children to hold.

Prevalence of injury from fireworks

A tenth (10%) of survey participants reported having experience of physical injury because of fireworks (either personally or through a friend or family member). Participants were most likely to have treated the injury either using first aid or by visiting A&E.

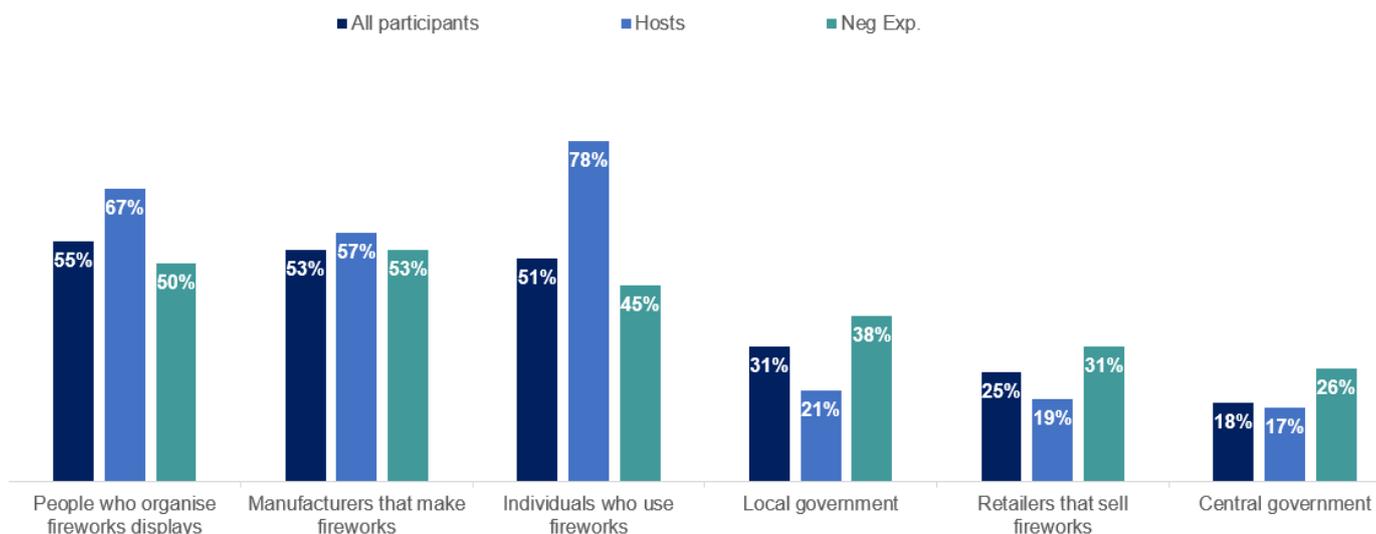
Our qualitative findings from interviewees with rejecters further explained the impact of a fireworks injury. Rejecters who had been injured by fireworks gave this as a key reason not to engage with them again. Other participants who did not like fireworks had heard stories from friends and family about them causing injury. One participant was hit by a fireworks when she was 15 years old (she was 19 years old at the time of the interview). She said that since then, she has tried to avoid them.

Responsibility for fireworks safety

Survey participants feel that consumers and manufacturers share the most responsibility for how safely fireworks are used in the UK: specifically, people who organise displays (55%), manufacturers (53%) and the individuals who use fireworks (51%). A third (31%) also feel local government is responsible, a quarter retailers (25%) and a small proportion central government (18%).

Hosts of private displays place more responsibility on consumers (68% for display organisers, 78% for individuals) and less on organisations.

Those who have had negative experiences with fireworks take a different view, placing less responsibility on consumers, and more on organisations (38% for local government, 31% for retailers and 26% for central gov.) See Figure 5.3.



Base: All participants (963)

Figure 5.3: Views on responsibility for safe use of fireworks in the UK

Industry stakeholders highlighted the importance of input from across industry and consumers in safe fireworks use.

Whilst stakeholders recognised that some consumers read the instructions provided on fireworks products, and in safety leaflets provided with these, they anticipated that this was not always done by many.

“Some [consumers] are very knowledgeable, some are diligent and others just think they’re fireworks, will carry on using them and not read the instructions and that’s one of the biggest things.”

Whilst they felt that consumers themselves needed to take responsibility for reading these, they recognised that disengagement in this was a challenge for the industry.

“They should read the firework instructions. They are extremely comprehensive. People need to read and follow the safety instructions.”

There was a suggestion that a national-level, government-backed programme of awareness raising regarding the importance of reading safety instructions, and key safety factors to be taken into account, could help improve public understanding of how to use fireworks safely. Stakeholders referenced previous national safety campaigns and television adverts about the Fireworks Code noting that these had been useful in educating the public about fireworks safety in the past.

“This goes back to the education side of things. If we go back to 2000 when the government used to put out public information films...all the good things in the fireworks code were actually out there...and they stopped. We’ve got a generation now who have grown up without having that information. And they treat fireworks like any other product. If you give people something to use, we want them to read the instructions, but people don’t.”

Stakeholders felt that nation-wide education could support public understanding and awareness of fireworks safety.

“At a government level there could be more [public] education for fireworks and more education on safety on awareness of what you’ve got as well, with respect for your neighbours, respect for animals, talk to your neighbours if you’re going to do fireworks. Those things I think we need to have education on.”

Retail settings were also seen as a touch-point during which consumers could be provided with information and guidance. Whilst stakeholders were confident that this was being carried out by specialist fireworks providers, some queried how extensive this type of information would be in other types of retail outlets and noted the challenge of ‘black-market’ sales where this would not be happening.

“[For example], a responsible retailer would ask: where are you letting them [fireworks] off, have you got the space to do it?”

Regulation of fireworks

Synopsis: *this chapter explores awareness of fireworks regulations and laws, views regarding current regulation, levels of support for regulatory change and appetite amongst the public for further information about regulation.*

Key findings

A little under half of survey participants (45%) say they know at least a little about how fireworks are regulated in the UK. Half (51%) know nothing.

Seven in ten (71%) say they are aware of the legal age for purchasing fireworks and a quarter (26%) that it is against the law to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7pm except on special occasions.

Of those who do have an opinion, on balance the public feels that the amount of regulation for organised public events is about right (41%), but a similar proportion (40%) suggest that there is too little regulation of private events.

Few back an outright ban on organised public fireworks displays and there is limited support for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public for use in private displays. Social media analytics though shows that there is a vocal minority who support a ban present on social media.

Industry stakeholders raise concerns about the role of social media in shaping what they feel to be disproportionately negative views towards the fireworks industry. Whilst they recognise concerns with regards to fireworks misuse, they feel that a ban could drive illegal and unregulated sale and use of fireworks and believe current regulations in the UK already set a standard for other countries to follow.

Survey participants show greater levels of support for time limits on the sale and use of fireworks, as well as when organised public displays can be held. This support is echoed by qualitative participants who dislike and try to avoid fireworks. They note that lack of time limits makes it difficult to plan for fireworks being set off or put things in place to help themselves, their children or their pets.

Industry stakeholders are keen to highlight the importance of enforcing current laws both to ensure appropriate and legal sale and use of fireworks but also to demonstrate the consequences and penalties if these are broken. They suggest that greater public information and education is needed to tackle unsafe use of fireworks.

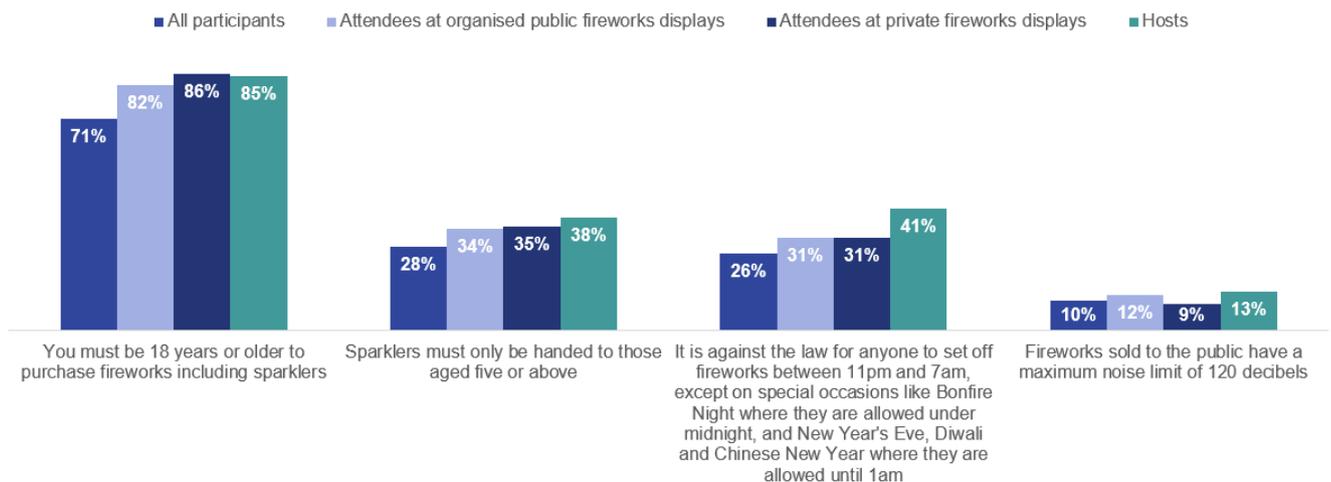
There is limited appetite for information about how fireworks are regulated although those with pets, children or who are personally negatively impacted by fireworks are keen for guidance and tips for how cope with fireworks being set off.

Awareness of laws and regulations

A little under half (45%) of survey participant say they know at least a little about how fireworks are regulated in the UK. Half (51%) report knowing nothing at all. Display attendees and hosts are no more likely to say they know at least a little.

When prompted for awareness of fireworks **rules and regulations**, seven in ten (71%) say they are aware that you must be 18 years or over to purchase fireworks (including sparklers). However, just a quarter (28%) know that sparklers should only be handed to those aged five or above, or that it is against the law to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am, except on special occasions (26%). Only a tenth (10%) claim to be aware that there are limits to the amount of noise fireworks can make.

Attendees (at either public or private displays) and hosts are more likely to be aware of fireworks rules and regulations when compared against both those who do neither, and the general population as a whole (see Figure 6.1).



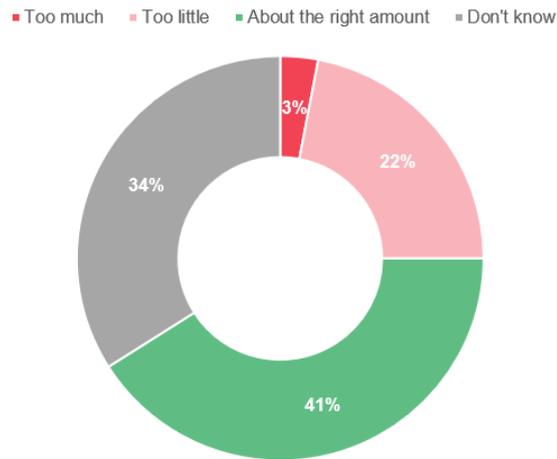
Base: All participants (973)

Figure 6.1: Awareness of fireworks rules and regulations

Are current regulations adequate?

Whilst awareness of regulations is limited, survey participants who have an opinion agree on balance that the amount of regulation surrounding organised public fireworks displays is about right (see Figure 6.2). Two-fifths (41%) feel that current levels of regulation are adequate, while among those who attended displays this increases to half (53%). A fifth (22%) say there is too little regulation, most often those who do not attend displays (26%) or have had a negative experience with fireworks (31%).

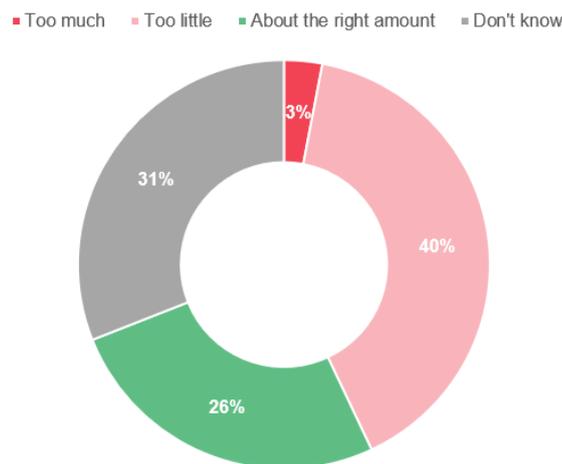
A third (34%) say they don't know whether the level of regulation is too much, too little or about the right amount; this is indicative of a lack of awareness regarding how fireworks are regulated in Great Britain among the general public.



Base: All participants (973)

Figure 6.2: Is the level of regulation around **public** fireworks display...

The public are more likely to support further regulation of private fireworks displays (see Figure 6.3). Two-fifths (40%) say that current levels of regulation are too little.



Base: All participants (973)

Figure 6.3: Is the level of regulation around **private** fireworks displays...

Perhaps unsurprisingly, hosts are most likely to say that current levels of regulation are adequate: six in ten (60%) feel this is the case. On the other hand, public display attendees are just as likely to support further regulation (42%) as the average. Attendees at private displays tend to agree that current levels of regulation are adequate (43%, while 32% think it's too little), while those with a negative experience of fireworks are most likely to support further regulation (57%).

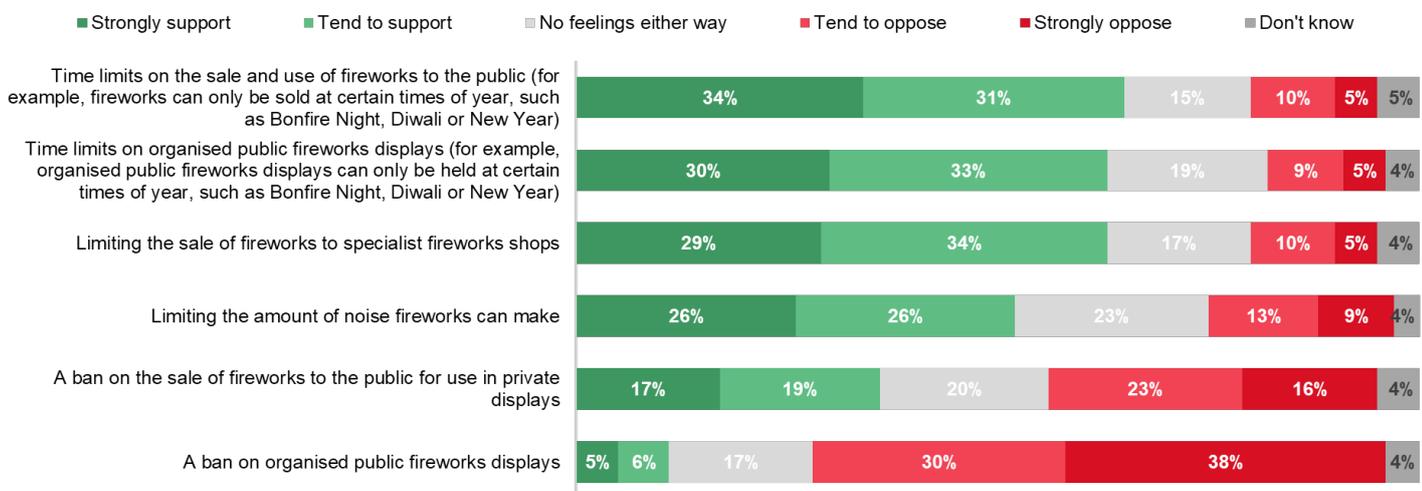
Stakeholders within the fireworks industry noted that fireworks are heavily regulated and that any further changes to regulation would require a dramatic shift in how fireworks are used and sold in this country. Stakeholders felt that the UK was among the safest countries in the world for fireworks regulation and that it had set a standard for others to follow. Stakeholders noted that regulations had changed over the years, making improvements to the industry.

“They’ve [regulations have] changed, 2005 was the first change, 2010 regulation came in, 2014 and 2015 and amendments to those regulations, it’s ongoing and progressive and making things better all the time. there is nothing that the industry has shied away from.”

Stakeholders also noted that over time improvements had been made to the quality, consistency and health and safety of fireworks manufacturing in China; where the industry imported fireworks from.

Views on regulatory change

Survey participants were presented with a range of ideas for regulatory change to understand their support for different options, as shown in Figure 6.4.



Base: All participants (973)

Figure 6.4: Levels of support for different types of regulation

Views towards bans

When asked what specific regulatory change they support or oppose, very few survey participants back an outright ban on organised public fireworks displays (just 11%). Similarly, there is limited support (36%) for a ban on the sale of fireworks to the public for use in private displays.

Some participants across the ethnographies voiced the opinion that the world was becoming too safety conscious and that fireworks were not as dangerous as was portrayed on social media and in the media.

“The adults have gone too safety conscious. It’s all about having to prove you’re 18 to buy fireworks... and you’re thinking ‘how many people have been actually killed by fireworks every year versus how many people are killed with knives, that [large supermarkets] sell?’ I could buy a knife easier than I could buy fireworks... I know what I’d be more worried about.”

However, our social media analytics data showed that there was a loud minority who were calling for the ban on fireworks. In total, 5,647 posts were related to requests to ban or change the sales of fireworks, or to ban events all together. It is important to note that the majority, but not all, of these posts were in support of a ban – smaller numbers opposed calls for a ban. This

was a prominent discussion online; for example, the most re-tweeted post across the whole dataset was a promotion for the petition to ban the sale of fireworks. In total, the word ‘ban’ was mentioned over 4,000 times. The most common sentiment among this group was to ban the sale of fireworks to the general public, but often allowing licenced events. Others were more definitive in their view that fireworks should be banned altogether. A range of reasons were given for supporting a change in regulation. The most prominent was welfare to animals, followed by impact on mental health – only a small number mentioned the risk of personal injury. There was also some concern about the environmental impact, especially on climate change.



Social media post

They should be banned for general public sale. Leave them to professionals who do fireworks displays that is a lot safer! Not people setting fireworks off because they want to while they have a drink. Fireworks should be banned. How many more animals need to suffer?

Views from industry stakeholders

Industry stakeholders were concerned by the portrayal of fireworks safety in the media - particularly on social media. Stakeholders felt that the way in which media and particularly, social media reported and shared views towards fireworks meant that the public could easily become misinformed about the disturbance and damage that fireworks caused. Stakeholders felt that these types of concerns were over-exaggerated and led to the creation of public perceptions such as “fireworks are getting louder”. Industry stakeholders challenged these perceptions and expressed concern regarding the impact that these had on the industry.

“It’s social media. The industry aren’t selling more fireworks. Fireworks aren’t getting louder.”

Stakeholders expressed concern that the negative attention the industry attracted was disproportionate to the harm it caused.

When reflecting on fireworks bans, industry stakeholders made the point that a ban on the sale of fireworks would be more dangerous than continuing to sell them legally. They argued that if fireworks were made illegal, they could still be sold in an unregulated black market. This would mean that there would be fewer safety checks and standards. Stakeholders felt this could result in members of the public buying more dangerous fireworks. Several stakeholders cited a decision made in Ireland to make buying fireworks illegal; they explained that firework related accidents had then increased because people were using unsafe fireworks.

“If there was a carpet ban, are we then going to see unsafe products enter the market?”

Stakeholders reflected that other changes such as focusing on types of fireworks available, and further limiting the range of these, could also result in driving more dangerous use of fireworks amongst the public.

“The more you trim down [the range of fireworks] the more the chances are that they [people who misuse fireworks] are going to start using something more dangerous.”

Views towards limits on fireworks sales and use

There is more public support – at over six in ten – for time limits on the sale and use of fireworks to the public, as well as on when organised public displays can be held, indicating a lack of awareness among the general public that such limitations already exist. A similar proportion (63%) say they would support limiting the sale of fireworks to specialist shops, (note that just a handful (13%) currently report that they would use this avenue to purchase fireworks).

Across the qualitative research those who did not like and tried to avoid fireworks felt that limitations regarding fireworks use should be more stringent. They felt there should be allotted times for fireworks on specific dates at specific times (e.g. 5th November 6pm – 11pm), rather than there being what they described as ‘a fireworks season’ with people using fireworks between November and January. These participants became especially frustrated when fireworks were set off at seemingly random times in the year – not bonfire night or New Year’s Eve. This meant that these participants could not plan for fireworks being set off or put things in place to help themselves, their children or their pets.

The role of enforcement

Fireworks industry stakeholders recognised concerns regarding fireworks use. Concerns included fireworks being used unsafely, out of season and late into the night. They were keen to highlight the importance of enforcing laws both to ensure appropriate and legal sale and use of fireworks but also to demonstrate the consequences and penalties if these were broken.

Stakeholders noted that much could be done to reassure the public about current regulation of fireworks, and strong enforcement was a key part of this. However, stakeholders conceded that the relevant authorities (e.g. police) were not always equipped to enforce these laws and that there needed to be better communication in general between the enforcement authorities, trading standards and the fireworks industry.

“The common message that comes out and we see this across social media is that where there is a problem it’s down to a lack of enforcement of the existing laws. There’s a lack of understanding within some police authorities in particular about what offenses are being committed by those who are abusing fireworks, there are questions about the knowledge of trading standards officers when they are licensing stores to hold and sell fireworks and I think the common message there is a lack of education.”

Appetite for further information

There is limited interest from the public in finding out more about how fireworks are regulated in Great Britain. Three in ten (29%) of those surveyed say they would be interested in finding out more about how organised public fireworks displays are regulated; a similar proportion (28%) say the same of private fireworks displays.

If they wanted to find out more, people say they would go to the internet (70%) or gov.uk (15%). Just 5% would visit a specialist fireworks shop.

Across the qualitative research, those who did not like fireworks because they negatively impacted their pets, children, or mental health wanted more information on how to cope with fireworks being set off. They wanted more information from vets about how to calm their animals. They also wanted to know how to comfort children who were scared of fireworks.

Industry stakeholders felt that educating the public on safe fireworks use would be an important part of ensuring that people use them responsibly. As discussed earlier (chapter 5), industry stakeholders referenced previous fireworks television campaigns that had helped educate the public, noting that this type of education had not be provided for the next generation of firework users. Stakeholders felt that this type of campaign could provide the public with information about responsible and safe use of fireworks.

“15-year olds have never been exposed to coordinated public awareness of safe use of fireworks. Anti-social behaviour could be a result of that.”

Concluding summary

This research shows that the British public hold a broadly favourable opinion of fireworks: a majority of those surveyed say they personally enjoy fireworks, and almost half have been to either a public or private display within the last three years. Participants in the ethnography commented on the importance of fireworks to culture and tradition in the UK.

However, there are concerns regarding safety, particularly at private fireworks displays. Whilst a majority of the general public surveyed agree that organised public fireworks displays are safe, a little under half say the same of private fireworks displays. In fact, a similar proportion consider private fireworks displays to be unsafe.

A variety of safety behaviours were observed at the private fireworks displays attended for the ethnographic research. While participants agreed that safety was a priority for enjoying an event, not all practices aligned with industry guidance. There was little use of the instructions that came with fireworks, and fireworks were often lit with a lighter rather than the taper provided. It was most often a lack of awareness of industry guidance, rather than a lack of willingness to comply, that hindered safety at a private event.

This observation is supported by findings from the survey. A majority of those surveyed are unclear about how to safely store fireworks. Just a sixth of survey participants who had bought fireworks stored them in a shed, while two-fifths stored them in their house, and a fifth in their garage. When prompted for awareness of specific rules and regulations, a majority were unaware of each, with the exception of the age limit for the purchase of fireworks.

However, there is limited interest from the public in finding out more about how fireworks are regulated in the UK. Similarly, despite safety concerns, very few back an outright ban on organised public fireworks displays or on the sale of fireworks to the public for private use. Industry stakeholders are keen to highlight the importance of enforcing current laws and feel that nation-wide education could support public understanding and awareness of fireworks safety.

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