

Grace Hallowell:

What's up College Station? I'm Grace Hallowell, and today my guest is Stu the Fire Guy from the College Station Fire Department. Hi.

Stu the Fire Guy:

How you're doing?

Grace Hallowell:

I'm doing well. It has been a minute since we've had you on the show, but it is summertime and we are here to talk about some summer fire safety tips. So to kick things off, it is almost Independence Day. So the big thing around this time is fireworks.

Stu the Fire Guy:

That's right. Independence Day is all about fireworks and celebrating our freedom and cooking out. And so there's a lot of ways to have fun and there's a lot of things to think about for your safety, especially when you're dealing with fireworks and a grill. So let's go over fireworks first.

First of all, fireworks are not allowed within the city limits of Call Station or Bryan. So if you're going to do fireworks, you need to be outside of the city. If you're going to buy fireworks, you've got to go outside of the city. There are alternatives to fireworks that you can use in the city. You can use noisemakers and poppers and glow sticks and things that just you can celebrate with but aren't going to be hot and burning. Even sparklers are not allowed in the City of College Station or City of Bryan. So that's rule number one.

But if you are going to go to somewhere where you can enjoy fireworks, you've got to do it safely. You've got to have a fireworks marshal, someone who's in charge of lighting the fireworks and putting them where they're going to be and where they're going to go and how far they're going to shoot. So appoint someone to be in charge. And that person needs to be an adult, a sober adult, and that person needs to be able to lay out all the rules and enforce the rules for everybody who's participating.

I mentioned sparklers. Sparklers cause the most injuries of all fireworks because they seem really safe and you're always handing them to the little kids who are going to run around and swing them around and then they burn down a little bit and they look like they're out, but they're still very, very hot. So sparklers cause a lot of burn injuries. That's the worst firework for injuries.

You think it might be Roman candles because they're shooting hot balls of flame out, but it's sparklers surprisingly enough. So we see a lot of injuries with sparklers, but just fireworks in general can be very dangerous. Make sure that you've got water nearby, preferably a water hose that's already turned on with the nozzle turned off so that as soon as something that shouldn't be on fire, lights on fire, you can spray it down very quickly.

Grace Hallowell:

Yes. So you're ready to go.

Stu the Fire Guy:

It's not a bad idea to have buckets of water around also. So you can put fireworks in there after they've been used. Any kind of dud firework, assume it's still going to go off for 15, 20 more minutes. And then you want to soak all those fireworks at the end of the night, put them in water, spray them down, put them in a bucket of water because that cardboard that they're made out of can smolder. And we've had incidents where people will load up all their firework trash, they're trying to do the right thing and clean up their area. They throw it into a cardboard box in the back of their truck, go driving down Highway 6 and before you know it, there's a fire in the back of their-

Grace Hallowell:

In a moving vehicle.

Stu the Fire Guy:

In a moving vehicle or in the back of their truck, starting little fires down the highway. So always soak down the used up fireworks and leave them alone and then clean up the next morning.

Grace Hallowell:

Yes. And the reason that fireworks are not allowed in city limits is because the houses are pretty close together. And when you're setting off fireworks, you don't want it to land on your roof or your neighbor's roof or in their yard. So I know a lot of people are like, "Well, why aren't they allowed? That's silly." But it's for everybody's safety.

Stu the Fire Guy:

That's right. It's for everybody's safety. And we always have a little bit of disobedience in the neighborhoods each year. Some people go out and shoot a few off, and our deputy fire marshals will be going around enforcing these rules and they could confiscate the fireworks that you have and they could write you a ticket. And you don't want to end your 4th of July night with a citation that you've got to come to the courthouse and pay.

But the reason we don't allow it in the city is because those sparks and those hot things can land on your house or other people's house and you would feel terrible, I'm sure, if your firework got caught in your neighbor's gutter and burned the roof off of their house. And the fire department would feel terrible because we don't like to go fight attic fires in the middle of the night, so ...

Grace Hallowell:

Not fun for anyone involved.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Yes, it's just for everybody's safety, don't pop firecrackers and fireworks in city limits.

Grace Hallowell:

Yes. And you mentioned grill safety. I know I've been grilling a lot more now that the weather is nice, but that also has the potential for some danger and fire hazards.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Absolutely. So grills are a great way to cook your food for a party, but you want to have someone, again, an adult who is in charge of that grill, the chef, and have that person make sure that the kids aren't playing around the grill, little hands are not coming up and touching the grill, that all the activity that's going on in the yard is away from where the grill is because if the grill gets touched or it gets knocked over, it can not just ruin your food, it can cause a lot of bad injuries.

Grace Hallowell:

And how close to your house should you keep your grill? I know I have a little covered patio and when it's raining and I still want to grill, I might move it a little closer, but that's not a smart idea.

Stu the Fire Guy:

It's not good to grill under a patio or under an overhang or even under the eave of your house. Your grill needs to be out in the yard, away. And even think about the trees that are over you.

Grace Hallowell:

Yes.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Anything combustible, you need to be several feet away from anything that's combustible, the shed, a wood pile, tall grasses, just stay away from those things. Again, like with fireworks, you can have a water hose nearby, and in case it does flare up and become a problem, you need to be able to handle it.

So be away from anything that's combustible, anything that might cause a problem if that grill flares up. The most important thing about grilling is to stay with the grill while you're using it. I mean, it's tempting to go back into the kitchen and start preparing the other things and work on the side dishes and go take care of something while the meat is cooking, but you need to be right there with it, keeping an eye on it in case something does happen.

Grace Hallowell:

Right. And kind of similar to grilling, I know a lot of people have little fire rings and like to have a fire at night when it's a little cooler, but there are some precautions that you need to take with those as well.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Yes, same precautions. Have somebody who's in charge and have somebody who's going to be dedicated to being with that fire. If you have a little recreational fire in the backyard or you're going to cook hot dogs and make s'mores. I know at the end of the school year this year, we went out and I made a little fire and it's in a fire pit that's built for a fire and the kids burned their schoolwork and celebrated the end of the year. But it was very well contained. I had the water hose right there and when all the schoolwork was burned up, we put it out with water and went back inside.

So don't leave it unattended, have someone in charge, and again, enforce the rules. Make the rules for the kids and everybody at the party. Don't get too close to this fire. You can set the chairs this far away and that's how we're going to do it.

Grace Hallowell:

Yes. And that is a good point with kids who are running around outside, make sure that they can enjoy the fire, be semi close, but not too close, and make sure that somebody is there attending to the children as well as the fire.

Stu the Fire Guy:

That's right. That's right. Another point I'll bring up is in this community, when we think of a bonfire, we think of the bonfire and in our mind is that's a huge fire. But the technical description of a bonfire is anything bigger than three by three by three feet. So if you've built a fire in your backyard that is bigger than three by three by three feet, you technically have a bonfire. And backyard bonfires are not allowed.

Grace Hallowell:

Correct.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Even though the bigger the fire, the more impressive, the more fun. And it's the same thing because those embers that are flying off of that big fire can float quite a ways away and end up again in your neighbor's gutter, causing a big problem for your neighbor or in your own gutter. So big fires are not allowed. Small recreational cooking a hot dog, burning a s'more fire, those are fine. But bonfires, anything bigger than three by three by three, not allowed.

Grace Hollowell:

Not okay.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Again, your neighbors will call and report you and we'll have to come out in the fire truck and help you put it out.

Grace Hollowell:

And that can be embarrassing.

Stu the Fire Guy:

It might be, yeah.

Grace Hollowell:

And kind of shifting things a little bit, still in the realm of safety, swimming and swimming pools are a big thing now that it is so hot, it's a great way to cool down. But they also have the potential for danger.

Stu the Fire Guy:

That's right. Summer's great for swimming, it's a great way to pass the afternoon. But whether you're going to the city pools, which are open now, or you're in a backyard pool or you're at your neighbor's house, again, an adult needs to be present. Someone who is responsible for everybody there. And just follow the basic swimming precautions. Know who can swim and who can't.

I know at summer camp, one of the first things they do with kids is do a swim test, and who can swim to the other side of the pool? Who can tread water and who cannot do these things? And if you're at a pool with friends or family or people that maybe you haven't met yet, you need to ask around, "Hey, hey, do your kids swim? Are they strong swimmers or are they not swimmers?" Because the truth is, if you're an adult at a pool party, every adult there is a lifeguard.

Grace Hollowell:

Right.

Stu the Fire Guy:

If you're at a backyard pool, every adult there, and even the older teenagers, they are the lifeguards.

Grace Hollowell:

Yes.

Stu the Fire Guy:

When they say no lifeguard on duty, that means everybody is the lifeguard. So be aware that some kids, they may look old enough to be strong swimmers, but may not be strong swimmers at all.

Grace Hollowell:

And even adults too.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Absolutely. Yeah. Just be aware that when panic sets in a pool or maybe you're at the lake, maybe you're at the river, when panic sets in, it becomes really serious, really fast.

Another thing is just always be scanning. Drowning is a silent thing. Once you're under the water, it's not like it is in the movies where you're screaming for help and waving your arms. Once you're under the water, you're not able to make any noise and that's it. And so you have to be seen and noticed for someone to be able to help you. So always be scanning for the littles at the pool. Be aware of who's a strong swimmer and who isn't, and just communicate with the other parents who are there and the other people that are present. Or ask kids themselves, "Are you comfortable in the water? Are you a good swimmer? Swim over there for me."

Grace Hollowell:

Yeah.

Stu the Fire Guy:

All right. Swim back.

Grace Hollowell:

Give them their own swim test.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Yeah, give them their own. Give them a swim test. That's a good day.

Grace Hollowell:

Okay, so we covered a lot today. If people have questions, where can they find out more?

Stu the Fire Guy:

The National Fire Protection Association has lots of information about firework safety, about grilling safety. They have little handouts. Maybe you want to print these things out and distribute them around your office or in your civic club or around your church. Those are good ideas. So the NFPA has good posters and flyers that you can find. And swimming safety also. There's websites where you can get these simple infographics and share them with people, put them up around places where people gather. If you have a bulletin board or something like that. Just all those little reminders constantly hitting us is what's going to help us be mindful when we're actually out there doing the grilling and playing with the fireworks and going to the pool.

Grace Hollowell:

Right. Visual learning, that's how I learn best.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Right.

Grace Hollowell:

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Well, thank you so much for joining me today.

Stu the Fire Guy:

Absolutely. Good to be here.

Grace Hollowell:

And that's What's Up.