



Safety in Scouting in Berkshire



BONFIRE PARTIES

Display bonfires can be great fun, and the central focus of many a celebration, particularly during dark evenings, and are associated with firework parties or displays. However, bonfires can seriously injure and kill spectators and organisers alike.

Be Prepared !

- Set up a team whose members can each take responsibility for a particular aspect of the event. If possible, try to recruit at least one person with previous experience of large bonfire parties. Team duties will include:-

Ensuring that the bonfire is built safely;
Keeping the public at a safe distance;
Making sure that the bonfire is extinguished safely; and
Making sure that there are suitable means for summoning the emergency services if necessary

- Carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment (remember POR !), and contact Scout Insurance Services.
- Contact the local fire and police if the display is likely to attract large numbers, and make sure you've got the provision of first aid covered. Warn neighbours that the event is being planned, and listen to any concerns they may have.
- Practice the various team tasks in the dark, including emergency response (and make sure there will be plenty of torches).
- Consider the provision of fire fighting equipment.
- You should choose a large, clear and well-mown area free from obstructions, well away (at least 18m) from any buildings, trees and hazards like overhead cables, with as many safe entrances and exits as possible. Make sure that all entrances are well lit, clearly signposted and kept free from obstructions. Clear away any undergrowth or very long grass. Allow for a change in wind direction or strength, and the expected number of spectators. Erect suitable barriers to prevent spectators getting too close.
- Proper crowd control is essential and needs good planning. Arrange for adequate stewards (adults, please) in hi-vis clothing to be responsible for just this. Team duties will include :-

Car parking
Bonfire safety
Crowd control (including stopping things, like fireworks, being thrown into the bonfire)
Secondary fire control
Cleaning up !
And, managing and coordinating incidents.

- You're never going to extinguish a large bonfire quickly, but organisers should be prepared to extinguish secondary fires (from sparks etc), *always provided* that is safe to do so. Consider portable water extinguishers, mains hoses where possible, buckets of sand or water, fire beaters, and of course, fire blankets.
- When building and lighting the bonfire :-
 - Build it evenly so that it collapses inwards as it burns
 - Ensure that no hazardous materials are used in it (such as aerosols, batteries, bottles, foam-filled furniture, rubber, tins of pain or varnish etc
 - Do not load vehicle tyres since they produce thick smoke when burning, and can fall off and roll into the spectators etc.
 - Guard the bonfire after building to ensure none of these materials find their way in, or that small animals (or indeed children) use it as a refuge.
 - Only use commercial firefighters to light the bonfire (never petrol or paraffin etc, and wear heavy, fire-resisting clothing.

At the Event

- Try to adhere to the advertised start and finish times.
- Ensure spectators do not breach the safety cordon.
- Remain vigilant at all times to fire, injury or indeed tom-foolery.
- Be firm when asking spectators to leave the site at the event close.
- Be ready to cancel the event in times of impending inclement weather.

After the Event

- Extinguish the bonfire.
- Clear the site of rubbish and equipment.
- Do not leave until it is certain the bonfire is properly extinguished, and that there is risk of secondary fires.

Further Information : <http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/bonfires.php>

See also the Firework Events factsheet

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