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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JUNE 30, 2017

From: The City of Evansville Environmental Protection Agency

Fireworks and Your Health

As the Fourth of July approaches, it will be time again for some of our friends and neighbors to bring out the fireworks in celebration. It is important to remember that while fireworks are great fun for some, they can be an aggravation to others and possibly pose a health threat to those with certain diseases and respiratory illnesses.

Smoke of all kinds is made of both coarse and fine particles. Fine particulates, or PM_{2.5}, are tiny particles about 1/30th the diameter of a human hair. During and for a few hours after fireworks are lit, air quality monitors in the area may detect a spike in particulate levels. This smoke from fireworks may be a health hazard to you or your neighbor.

People most sensitive to smoke are children, the elderly, and people with heart or respiratory conditions. Short-term exposure to smoke can aggravate lung disease, trigger asthma attacks, and increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

To minimize the impacts from fireworks smoke, sensitive individuals should reduce or eliminate their use of personal fireworks which concentrate smoke at ground level. Although the large aerial displays at community events produce more smoke, these fireworks are launched at greater heights, so the smoke is able to dissipate more before reaching people at ground level.

If you are very sensitive to smoke, enjoy the fireworks from a distance or even stay inside and watch from the window.

It is also important to be aware that the fireworks you use can affect those around you. The smoke may cause breathing issues for neighbors, the debris could create a fire hazard to neighboring properties, and the noise could be bothersome to those nearby.

Within the city of Evansville, some personal fireworks are allowed for use on July 4th between 10:00 a.m. and midnight and on the days leading up to and following July 4th from 5-10:30 p.m. For more information please visit www.evansville.in.gov or www.codepublishing.com/in/evansville (Chapter 9.10.020).

Thank you and have a safe, healthy, and happy holiday!

Jacob Keating
Director – Evansville EPA