

# South Carolina draws fireworks buffs from afar

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Independence Day is just around the corner, and residents of, say, Baltimore may be getting the itch to jump in the car and pick up some bottle rockets. They'll have to drive to South Carolina. And down south in Miami, where fireworks of some kind always seem to be happening, Fourth of July fun-seekers wanting anything more powerful than a sparkler will have to head for South Carolina, too. South Carolina is one of only two states that have no restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks by individuals - although it is illegal to use them in the city of Spartanburg - and fireworks vendors say the state has become a Mecca for bottle-rocket shooters from all over the country. "Some of my best customers are from Massachusetts and New Jersey," said Paul Brock, owner of several area Poor Paul's Fireworks outlets. "They drive down here." Brock remembers one New Jersey customer who filled his recreational vehicle with 50 cases of fireworks, then tried to load on about a dozen more. "I talked him out of buying them," Brock said. "He was lucky to make it out of here with what he did." Selling fireworks is illegal in New Jersey, but Brock said he doubted the man was buying \$50,000 worth of fireworks to shoot off in his back yard. Anyone who buys fireworks without a South Carolina fireworks license must pay sales tax, and what he does with them after that is his business, Brock said. A survey by USA Today showed that only South Carolina and New Hampshire have no state laws restricting the sale and use of fireworks by individuals. New Hampshire allows the sale of fireworks this season because of a legislative misstep; a ban begins July 23. Twelve states, including neighboring North Carolina and Georgia, ban fireworks altogether. Most others allow only sparklers and fountains, restrict the sale and use of fireworks to peak periods of the year, or give counties the power to crack down on firecrackers. Vendors say most out-of-state customers come from North Carolina and Georgia. But it's not just our neighbors who plunder our pyrotechnics. Besides the customers who drive down from the Northeast, Brock also ships fireworks as far away as Alaska, selling them at retail prices. W.C. "Corky" Taylor of Taylor Fireworks on Asheville Highway in Spartanburg also sees a lot of out-of-state business, but he says most of his customers during the Fourth of July are locals. As usual, business this year, is, well, booming, fireworks vendors said. Until about 1976 there was little Fourth of July market for fireworks in South Carolina, Brock said. But as Northerners moved to the South, they brought their traditions with them, and business has steadily increased every year. "Business just keeps getting better," Taylor said, adding that customers have gotten more sophisticated. Bottle rockets and firecrackers used to be the biggest sellers, but now customers are getting into larger displays, he said. The federal Consumer Product Safety Commission has cracked down on fireworks coming into U.S. ports, said Brock, who distributes fireworks to about 80 vendors throughout South Carolina. About 95 percent of the fireworks he sells are made overseas, mostly in China, where recent turmoil has apparently not interrupted the pyrotechnic pipeline. "I would never thought it would blossom into something like this," Brock said, looking at the boxes of fireworks piled high at his fireworks emporium. Ken Porter, owner of Porter's Fireworks on South Church Street in Spartanburg, said Christmas this year was very slow, but he thinks that's just an indication of a dying tradition during that time of year, and not an indicator of how sales will go this summer. "We don't know this year because (the 4th) is on a Tuesday," he said. "We don't know how to gauge it."

## SAFETY TIPS:

Fireworks injuries of all kinds in the United States jumped 10 percent in 1988 to about 10,200, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Almost half of the fireworks eye injuries last year struck children 5-14 years old. Shooting off fireworks is illegal in the city of Spartanburg. For a safer Fourth of July, follow a few fireworks tips from the Division of the State Fire Marshal:

- Children using fireworks should always be supervised by a responsible adult.
- Never allow children to play "war" with fireworks.
- Some fireworks are made with gunpowder and other potentially explosive materials. Never mix with other substances.

- Light fireworks one at a time, and stay a safe distance away after lighting.
- Keep a container of water nearby to throw on misfires.
- Never ignite fireworks in metal, plastic or glass containers. Shoot fireworks in an open area, away from buildings or trees.