

# Shoppers out to get their fireworks Fourth of July

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Upstate shoppers were on the prowl Thursday for Twitter Slitters, Black Widows and Tiger Tails.

They weren't hunting exotic animals. They were looking for fun packaged in small bundles of explosives. Fireworks shoppers getting ready for the Fourth of July weekend were out Thursday filling their carts with the animal sound-alikes as well as old standbys like Roman candles, mortars and sparklers. One of the state's grandfathers of boom, 68-year-old Paul Brock, was hiding in his office at Poor Paul's Fireworks on Asheville Highway to avoid giving discounts to crowds of all his regular customers. Briefly stepping out of his office, Brock gave 10 and 15 percent discounts to people he recognized at the register. "I get the same people year in and year out," the ex-Army demolitionist chuckled. "Now they all want discounts." Brock said business was good this year, and that the only thing that could be bigger than the July 4 sales are the coming millennium fireworks parties. Poor Paul's is a sprawling store that fills most of a mini-mall, but Brock remembers starting in a bus parked on the side of the road in 1955. He said much has changed about the fireworks business, including the number of sellers.

When he started, only two other licensed vendors sold fireworks in the state, he said. Now he said there are more than 60 in Spartanburg County alone. The fireworks themselves have changed as well, he said. "Safety has really changed, and the product is a better quality," he said. Statistics back up his claim. The National Council of Fireworks Safety states that firework-related injuries are down by more than 40 percent since 1990, with about six injuries per 100,000 pounds of fireworks exploded. Last year, consumers purchased 112.6 million pounds of fireworks, down by 20.3 million pounds from 1997, according to the council. Recent rains, which dampen the chance for a brush fire, also make shooting fireworks safer this year, said State Fire Marshal Lewis Lee. "The state is near drought, but that has changed in a majority of the state, though there are still some pockets of dry areas. Some areas received significant rainfall and that would help in any type of fire situation," he said. Lighting up in the city of Spartanburg can lead to trouble. Lt. Jennifer Kindall with the Spartanburg Police Department said the city's ordinance ban on selling, shooting or possessing fireworks will be enforced. Instead of covertly shooting off bottle rockets in the back yard, Kindall recommends watching the city's professional show, the All-American Fourth presentation in downtown Spartanburg Saturday. If you are caught shooting fireworks in the city, you might face a fine, but Kindall said most violators get a warning - the first time. "A lot of people aren't aware of the ordinance, so we make them aware. ... We just want this holiday to be a safe one," she said.