BONFIRE SAFETY

Each year in Northern Ireland, hundreds of bonfires are lit and enjoyed in safety by many people. However, every year there are serious injuries and damage to property, which could have been avoided.

Whilst the Orange Order does not organise the bonfires, it is pleased to be associated with the community organisations who do, and we hope this leaflet will help improve the safety of these events which are so important to our culture.

The Fire Brigade offers the following Fire Safety advice to help everyone have a safe bonfire.

• Site well away from houses, garages, sheds, fences, overhead cables, trees and shrubs.

• As a guide allow a ratio of 1:5, ie, the distance from the bonfire to the nearest property should be 5 times the height of the bonfire.

• Build the stack so that it is stable and will not collapse.

• Never build a hut or den inside the bonfire.

• Do not burn foam filled furniture, tyres, aerosols, tins of paint or bottles.

• Responsible adults should look after lighting the bonfire. Before lighting the fire check that no children or pets are hiding inside it.

• Never use flammable liquids (petrol or paraffin) to light the fire - Use domestic firelighters.

• Keep everyone away from the fire - especially children who must be supervised at all times.

• For an emergency keep buckets of water, a garden hose or a fire extinguisher ready.

• At any sign of danger ring the Fire Brigade, remember they are there to protect LIFE and PROPERTY.
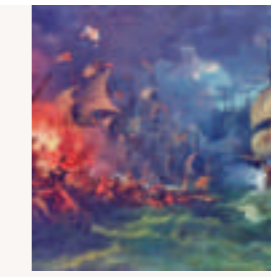
IF YOU ARE HAVING A BONFIRE…

DO:
Plan the event and consult properly.
Choose an appropriate site.
Have a competent adult in charge
Check that all is safe during the event
Contact the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service if anything goes wrong
Organise a cleanup afterwards

DON'T:
Stockpile material
Build the bonfire too high
Place hazardous material on the fire
Light with inflammable liquid
Allow children anywhere near the bonfire

Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland
Schomberg House
368 Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 9EY
Tel: 028 9070 1122
email: info@grandorangelodge.co.uk

BURNING PASSION

THE HISTORIC TRADITION OF BONFIRES

SINCE 1795
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Ancient Traditions

Since the very dawn of mankind, fire has been one of the most important factors in the development of society as we now know it. Not only was fire used for warmth, light and cooking, it became a centre for social activity, a thing of religious and spiritual ritual, a means of remembering and celebration.

circa 400AD
The Coming of Christianity

The coming of Christianity to the island of Ireland caused a fundamental shift in religious belief. Gone were the days of the fire worshippers and instead the bonfire took on another significance. Feast days and other religious holidays were celebrated around the bonfire as the whole community joined together to feast and praise God.

July 1588
The Spanish Armada

Fire and light have always been used as a means of communication and signalling. Armies would often use bonfires as a means of communicating the imminent approach of danger. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is the lighting of beacons and bonfires when the Spanish Armada was sighted, first off the coast of England and later as the stricken Spanish ships rounded the Irish coast.

5 November 1605
The Gunpowder Plot

"Remember Remember the Fifth of November". On the 5th November 1605 Guy Fawkes was discovered under the Houses of Parliament. His mission was to blow it up and kill King James I. This was to be the pinnacle of a counter-Reformation plot in England, but the conspirators were betrayed and rounded up before being executed.

5 November 1688
The Glorious Revolution

On 5th November 1688 William III Prince of Orange landed at Torbay in England. He had come at the request of the people to remove his father-in-law King James II from the throne and to restore the rights which James had removed from his subjects. William agreed to a new Bill of Rights that is the framework upon which the UK's modern day Democracy is founded. On hearing of William and Mary's coronation, bonfires were lit all over Ulster from hilltop to hilltop in celebration.

December 1689
Derry Day

Traditionally effigies of Colonel Lundy are burned upon bonfires. Lundy was the Governor of Londonderry in 1688-89. When the city fell under seige he advocated surrendering the city to King James II's army, but the defenders refused. Lundy, under the cover of darkness, then fled the city - entering Protestant folklore as a notorious traitor. To this day in Northern Ireland, someone who is regarded as a traitor is called a "Lundy". In 1915 during the First World War, Derry Day was celebrated by the Derry Battalion of the 10th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. It was the 246th anniversary of the shutting of the gates, but they felt that just because they were in France didn't mean they had to break with tradition.

June 1690
King William enters Belfast

In June 1690 William landed at Carrickfergus with 15,000 men in order to take command personally. As he marched into Belfast, bonfires were lit amongst great jubilation.

July 1690
The Night before the Boyne

Bonfires in Belfast are synonymous with the "11th Night" in July. These bonfires are a means of commemorating William III's victory over James II at the Battle of the Boyne. Bonfires are used as a representation of the bonfires lit in celebration of William's coronation and entry into Belfast, but also as a representation of the camp fires of William's troops the night before the Battle. The Battle was fought on the 1st of July, but changes in the Christian calendar mean its anniversary is now celebrated on the 12th of July.

1886
The first Home Rule Bill

When the first Home Rule Bill was defeated in 1886, the defeat was received by Unionists with delirious rejoicing. Bonfires were lit on the hills around Belfast.

1932
Belfast Outdoor Relief Strike

Bonfires were used as a focal point for the strike in which workers joined together to protest against their working conditions.

1945
VE Day

Throughout Belfast and indeed Northern Ireland, bonfires were used as a focal point for the celebrations of Victory in Europe Day, when the Axis forces in Europe surrendered. Huge street parties were held and bonfires erected and lit as the tremendous outpouring of jubilation reverberated around the city and the country.

1969
The Troubles

The Troubles in Northern Ireland are synonymous with the burning of bonfires. Streets within both communities were barricaded and the burning of bonfires was used to show defiance. The Republican movement often used bonfires during key phases such as the Hunger Strike support rallies as a means of focussing the Republican and Nationalist community. Unionists and Loyalists also used the tradition of bonfires as a means of galvanizing their community - Unionists as a means of maintaining tradition and expressing their community's defiance against the dilution of their rights.