

Emily Sexson

Education Specialist

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In 1776, John Adams wrote to his wife and stated that the Declaration of Independence “will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival” and that “It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more.” Since the Declaration's approval and signing on July 4th that year, John Adams would be happy to know that his ideas about the day have been fulfilled.

With the 4th of July quickly approaching, the fireworks have already begun. Fireworks are a fun way to celebrate with a quite literal bang! As with any recreational activity done outside, it's important to be aware of your surroundings and the impact you have on the environment. This is important not only for your own safety and those around you but the wildlife around you as well. Think ahead before purchasing fireworks; this will help you have the safest and most fun celebration possible.

If possible look for fireworks that have minimal packaging. Check to see if any of the packaging can be recycled or reused. Legal fireworks have to pass certain regulations for the chemicals they use, but be aware of the waste you generate and how you are going to manage it. Keep water on hand and a place to dispose of your used fireworks properly. Always clean up after your celebration, collecting any debris or waste. Keep your celebration free of pollution; firework waste can travel in the wind or leach into waterways and could be hazardous to wildlife.

Completely extinguish everything you ignite. With our dry conditions in southwest Kansas, even the smallest spark could start a devastating fire.

Lee Richardson Zoo will be open on Tuesday, July 4th, with the West Green of the zoo open for extended hours for the Municipal Band concert and fireworks viewing. The 4th Street vehicle entrance gate will close at 8:00 pm, with free vehicle admission from 6:00-8:00. After 8:00 pm the 5th Street exit gate will open for latecomers to enter free of charge. The band will begin to play at 8:00 PM and the fireworks display will begin at dark. For the safety of the public as well as the animal inhabitants, the zoo does not allow fireworks or pets on grounds at any time.

For more information about the 4th of July at the zoo, call 620-276-1250 or visit www.leerichardsonzoo.org. The Fourth of July holiday without fireworks is like Valentine's Day without hearts, and Christmas without the tree, the two go hand in hand. No matter how you celebrate our nation's independence, we hope that you do so safely and with regard for the wildlife and environment around you, have a wonderful Independence Day!