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June 28, 2006

Dear Editor:

As we all make plans for this year's Fourth of July celebration, few ingredients are as universally valued and anticipated as the annual fireworks show. Year after year, they light the skies in communities across the nation and bring out the patriot in all of us.

The large-scale productions we delight in each year are the work of small businesses, many of which are fourth and fifth generation family companies and all of which are in crisis. Due to overzealous regulators at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), this year's fireworks celebrations could very well be our last.

The ATF has created a number of overlapping, uncoordinated regulations and inspection policies that make compliance nearly impossible. ATF inspectors know little about the fireworks industry and products. On top of that, the bureau imposes immense burdens during the industry's busiest times and designs rules with little regard for how they promote public safety or the security of workers.

Despite ongoing efforts by fireworks industry representatives to voice concerns and develop solutions with ATF, they have hit one wall after another. Although some of the major companies will survive and conduct shows in the big cities, family companies will have to shut their doors, and small town America will be left in the dark.

The fireworks industry respects safety and wants to comply with all regulations. Business owners and employees take pride in maintaining a safe and secure environment for shows and operations.

It's not too late to act, but it's critical that change happen soon. The fireworks industry needs help. In the coming months, representatives of the American Pyrotechnics Association will ask Congress and ATF to help develop real solutions to the industry's challenges.

This Fourth of July, when you look to the skies in excitement for the annual fireworks show, give pause to think about how wonderful and cherished a family event it is. We must all fight to ensure this American tradition endures.

Sincerely,

Julie L. Heckman  
*Executive Director*