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CONTACT: Kyra Jennings or Kevin Cate (850) 413-2842

CFO SINK AND EMERGENCY MANAGERS URGE 4TH OF JULY FIREWORKS SAFETY

TALLAHASSEE — Florida CFO and State Fire Marshal Alex Sink today joined State Emergency Management officials to urge Floridians to observe fire safety rules and follow fireworks laws as they celebrate this Fourth of July.

“As we gather this Fourth of July weekend to celebrate America’s Independence, I urge Floridians and visitors to take the proper fire safety precautions to protect themselves and their loved ones,” said CFO Sink. “All fireworks can be dangerous, and that makes it all the more crucial that the public only use state approved fireworks for their celebrations.”

Nearly 9,800 Americans were treated for fireworks related injuries in emergency rooms in 2007. In Florida alone, fire departments responded to at least 145 fires related to fireworks and sparklers, resulting in more than \$920,000.00 in damages during 2007.

“The Fourth of July is a time for Floridians to come together and enjoy family and friends, but unfortunately many end up visiting emergency rooms,” said Interim State Emergency Management Director Ruben Almaguer. “We want our residents and visitors to celebrate safely this weekend and use only state approved fireworks.”

Under Florida law, only sparklers, approved by CFO Sink’s Division of State Fire Marshal, are legal for consumer usage. However, an exemption in the law allows for the use of un-approved fireworks for agricultural purpose, such as frightening birds from agricultural works and fish hatcheries. Anyone using fireworks under the agricultural exemption must have a permit from the Sheriff in the county where they will use the product. Without a permit, it is illegal to use fireworks in Florida, which include: shells and mortars, multiple tube devices, Roman candles, rockets and firecrackers.

As a general guideline, anything that flies through the air or explodes is not allowed for consumer use. Floridians should not sign “waivers” in order to purchase fireworks. Signing a waiver will not clear a consumer of responsibility should you be caught illegally using fireworks, which is a first-degree misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

There is still a risk of injury with the use of legal sparklers. When lit, some sparklers can reach temperatures between 1,300 and 1,800 degrees - at least 200 degrees hotter than a standard butane lighter. For a list of hundreds of sparklers that are legal to use in Florida, as well as safety tips, visit the State Fire Marshal’s web site at <http://www.MyFloridaCFO.com/sfm/sparklerindex.htm> .

To celebrate safely, CFO Sink advises Floridians to follow these precautions:

- Use sparklers and other legal novelties on a flat, hard surface. Do not light them on grass.
- Use sparklers in an open area. Keep children and pets at least 30 feet away from all ignited sparklers.
- Light only one item at a time and never attempt to re-light a “dud.”
- Don’t use any unwrapped items or items that may have been tampered with.
- Keep a fire extinguisher or water hose on-hand for emergencies. It’s a good idea to drop used sparklers in a bucket of water.
- Only purchase fireworks from licensed vendors.
- Never allow young children to play with or ignite fireworks.
- Never have any portion of your body directly over a fireworks device when lighting the fuse.
- Never carry fireworks in your pocket or shoot them off in metal or glass containers.