

Advice to Families: Costumes and Safety at The Real Halloween

Parents and carers coming to The Real Halloween are advised to ensure that they and any children they bring do not wear shop-bought flammable fancy dress costumes. These can be [classed as toys](#) and not tested to the same standards as normal clothes.

The risks of such costumes have been highlighted in 2015 by the case of Claudia Winkelman's daughter and by the advice of Fire Services (see below 'More on Flammable Costumes').

Tea lights are used in the Jam Jar Lanterns at The Real Halloween but are only lit by crew at the start of the Story in the Woods or the Parade. Being contained in a jar these should not pose an unreasonable risk if under parental/carer supervision. If on consideration, parents wish to bring battery-powered tea lights they should do so but the main event will still include use of tea lights for the story in the woods and the Parade of Animal Lanterns.

We encourage people to 'dress up' if they wish but advise against use of plastic or other flammable artificial materials including in home-made costumes. The atmosphere we seek to create at the event is often described as 'medieval fairyland' and most natural materials such as cotton or wool are relatively non-flammable as well as being more in keeping.

We have a few open but contained and attended fires on site, including to help show children how to tend a real wood fire safely, and to help maintain the atmosphere of the event. Parents and carers are reminded of their responsibility to children, including in choice of clothing and are advised that if children do attend in fancy dress costumes, they should not go near open flames. Visitors should always follow the advice of crew on site including while fire performances are in progress, when they should not leave the path.

Chris Rose, Director of the Fairyland Trust says: "We want families to enjoy themselves at The Real Halloween and we know many enjoy the authentic atmosphere and natural surroundings. What their children wear is ultimately up to parents and carers but our advice is to try and avoid shop bought costumes unless you are confident these are non-flammable. Many people achieve great costumes by using clothes and decorations such as real leaves, which are certainly not very flammable. Some open fires and

the candle lit story in the woods are an integral part of the attraction of the event.”

Compliance

The Real Halloween and other Fairyland Trust events are Risk Assessed and only conducted after being approved by the relevant authorities. This includes attention to possible risks associated with trees on site (eg limb drop), fire performers, open fires, tea-light candles, hot drinks, trip hazards in and around tents and other structures, and moving vehicles.

Mitigations include restrictions on access under some trees, prior tree limb assessment by the site owners, monitoring wind levels, separation of fire performers from audiences, not leaving fires unattended, verbal briefing of parents/carers when making jam jar lanterns, provision of water and sand in case of burns or breakages, on site First Aid cover, radio coordination, not hot drinks in workshop tents, safety checking structures, and a ban on moving vehicles except emergencies, while the public are on site.

Risks and Benefits

A great part of the attraction of The Real Halloween (and The Fairy Fair) events held by the Fairyland Trust are the opportunities children get to play in and explore ‘natural’ surroundings including ancient woods and trees, and the ‘magical atmosphere’ created by traditional real fires, and candles at dusk. It is impossible to eliminate all risks associated with such events without also losing many of the benefits.

For example, there is always a chance that children could hurt themselves playing with sticks or branches in making Secret Dens. But if children never learn to play reasonably safely with natural materials in natural environments, they will grow up unable to engage with nature and to bring up their own children to do so, and thus lose the many personal development and health benefits associated with outdoor play.

As well as balancing the benefits of play with the possible risks, we also aim to be as environmentally friendly as possible in a similar way. For example flame retardant chemicals are often Persistent Organic Pollutants such brominated flame retardants, and batteries may contain heavy metals. When they enter the environment, these pose human health and ecological hazards.

Our overall approach is to try and achieve a risk-benefit balance, in line with much [modern thinking](#) about the benefits of outdoor play for children.

We do not allow visitors to light their own fires at our events but at The Real Halloween we do show children (with the 'Fire Boys) how to tend a (contained) fire. Anyone in a potentially flammable costume will be advised not to take part in this activity.

The [Forestry Commission says](#):

Building fires is a great learning activity for children and learning about fire can help to prevent the anti-social aspects of arson and fire raising. Learning how to build a fire properly can also be a real achievement for a child or young person

More on Flammable Costumes

In May 2015 Claudia Winkelman drew the [attention of the media](#) and public to case of her daughter who suffered severe burns when a Halloween costume she bought in a super-market proved to be highly flammable and caught fire. In June 2015 some [supermarkets](#) said they would demand stricter fire safety levels on children's costumes.

Since that time some Fire Services have offered [specific advice to parents](#) about costumes including:

- 1) Check the labels on any fancy dress outfits you buy and see what fire resistance they offer
- 2) If in doubt check with the customer services department or the store manager
- 3) Do not let your child go near any ignition sources – sparklers can burn at up to 2,000 degrees Celsius
- 4) Replace candles in pumpkins with battery powered candles – these are cheap, they do not blow out and they are much safer
- 5) Teach your child to STOP, DROP and ROLL in the event that their clothing does catch fire

6) In an emergency cool any burns with large amounts of water and get urgent medical assistance