



Running a fireworks display this Bonfire Night: the checks organisers miss

Finish times, safety zones, who to tell, wind and stewards, with the rules in each UK nation

OTAS Insight LG-001 | All levels: Operational • Tactical • Strategic

Correct as of 20 October 2026 | United Kingdom | Not legal advice | otas.live/insights/



The short version: the checks organisers miss

The cut-off

England, Wales and Scotland

- Midnight on 5 November only
- 11pm on every other night, including weekends
- Scotland has its own permitted hours
- Northern Ireland: follow your DoJ licence

The site

Three areas, marked in daylight

- Spectators
- Firing zone, with a safety zone around it
- Fallout zone, where debris lands
- Check for overhead power lines

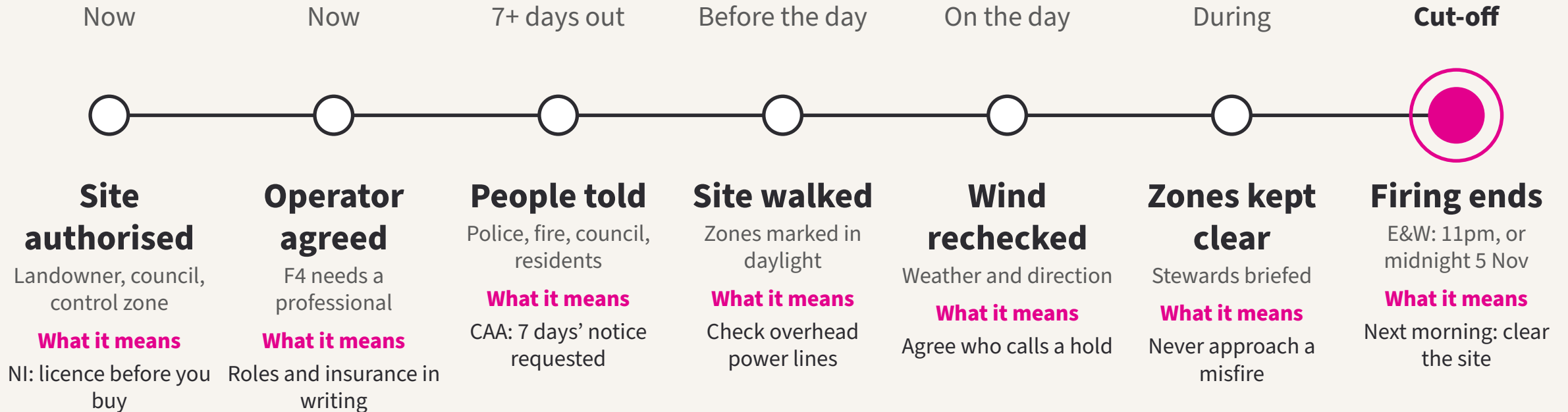
The people

Tell them early

- Police and fire service: at least 7 days before
- CAA if aircraft may be affected
- Residents, in advance

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with the differences shown. General information, not legal advice.

From now to the last firework: 7 checks in order



Planning order, not an official timeline. The 7 day points come from OPSS and CAA guidance. Northern Ireland licence applications need much longer.

Firework categories, and where the nations differ

01 • Indoor

F1

Party poppers and sparklers. Aged 16 and over
1 metre minimum

02 • Garden

F2

Adults only. Relatively confined outdoor areas
5 metres minimum

03 • Display

F3

Adults only. Large open spaces
25 metres minimum

04 • Professional

F4

Licensed professionals only
In untrained hands they can be lethal (HSE)

05 • Scotland

Control zones

Councils can ban igniting fireworks in a zone
Exemptions for public and professional displays

06 • Northern Ireland

DoJ licence

Needed to buy, possess and use display fireworks
One council's guidance: apply six weeks ahead

Minimum distances from OPSS guidance and each firework's label. Volunteers may only use F2 and F3.

The cut-off: the check most often missed

- **England and Wales** No adult fireworks from 11pm to 7am. Midnight on 5 November, 1am on New Year's Eve, Chinese New Year and Diwali.
- **One exemption** Local authority staff putting on the authority's own display.
- **It covers F2, F3 and F4** OPSS says the times apply to every display category.
- **Scotland** Public use 6pm to 11pm. Professional and community public displays may also fire from 7am to 6pm.
- **Penalty** Up to six months in prison, a fine, or both.
- **Plan for it** Build the running order back from the cut-off, with a margin for delays.

This year's dates

Saturday 31 October cut-off 11pm

Thursday 5 November cut-off midnight

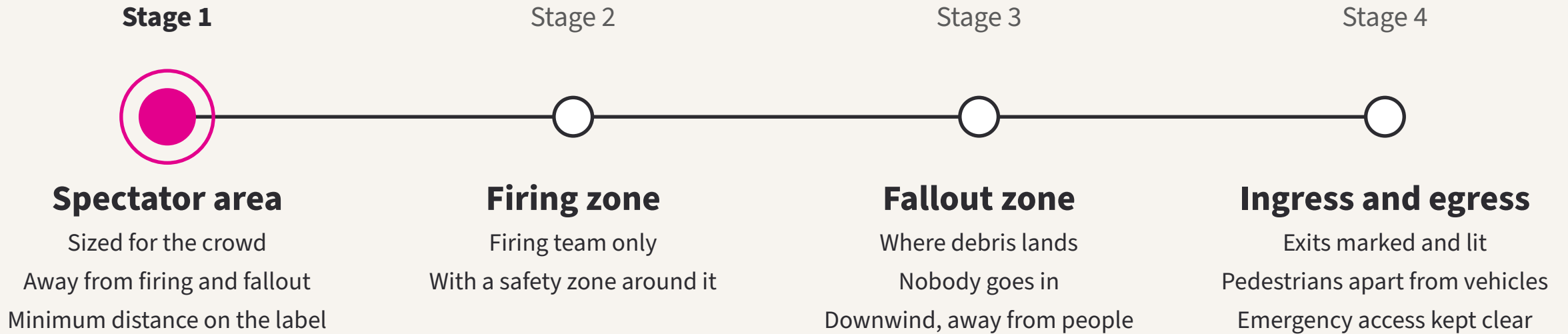
Saturday 7 November cut-off 11pm

Any other night cut-off 11pm

The point

Bonfire Night is a Thursday this year. Most weekend displays do not get midnight.

Three areas, plus the way out



Check in daylight: overhead power lines and obstructions, then mark every area before the public arrive (OPSS, HSE).

7 days: the minimum notice for the people who need to know

7

days: the minimum OPSS gives for consulting the police and fire service, and the notice the CAA asks for when aircraft may be affected.

Council. Ask if you need a permit. In Scotland, ask about firework control zones.

Nearby airport. HSE says you may need to contact it if your site is close.

Residents and animals. Tell neighbours in advance and check for farms, stables or zoos nearby.

Stewards. OPSS says one per 250 spectators. We found no legal basis, so treat it as a minimum.

In Northern Ireland, one council's guidance says apply for the licence at least six weeks before the display. The Department of Justice sets the closing dates.

Operational: what stewards, crew and firers can do

- **Know the three areas** Spectators, firing zone with its safety zone, fallout zone.
- **Keep the zones clear** Only the firing team in the firing zone. Nobody in the fallout zone.
- **No spectators' fireworks** Turn them away at the gate.
- **Leave misfires alone** Never relight or approach one. Tell the operator.
- **Bonfire rules** Check inside first, no petrol or paraffin, one person lights it.
- **Exits at the end** Keep routes clear and lit as the crowd leaves.

Whose job it is

The organiser and operator plan the display. You keep the zones clear on the night.

What to expect at briefing

- Your post and zone
- The stop signal
- Who calls the emergency services
- Where first aid is
- Unsure? Ask before the crowd arrives.

In danger? Use the site emergency procedure and call the emergency services.

Tactical: what display and site managers put in place

01

Walk the site in daylight

Power lines, obstructions and space for fallout

Keep: marked site plan

02

Set the running order

End firing by 11pm, or midnight on 5 November only

Keep: running order

03

Recheck the wind

Weather and direction on the day. Agree who calls a hold

Keep: weather check note

04

Brief every steward

Zones, stop signal and emergency plan

Keep: briefing sheet

05

Plan the way out

Pedestrians apart from vehicles, exits lit, emergency access clear

Keep: site plan

06

Clear up next morning

Check for unfired fireworks and dispose of them safely

Keep: site check note

Three levels: Operational for stewards, crew and firers, Tactical for display and site managers, Strategic for organisers, committees and directors.

Strategic: what organisers, committees and directors decide

Decision	What it looks like	Evidence to keep
Who fires	A professional operator for F4. Volunteers use F2 and F3 only	Operator agreement
Site authorised	Landowner permission, council permit, and in Scotland a control zone check	Written permissions
Northern Ireland licence	Department of Justice licence in place before buying fireworks	Licence
Notifications	Police and fire at least 7 days before. CAA if aircraft may be affected	Emails and references
Roles in an emergency	Who does what, and who calls the emergency services	Written plan
Insurance	The operator's public liability cover for F4 fireworks, seen	Certificate copy
Risk assessment	Risk assessment and, where it applies, fire safety risk assessment	Dated assessments
Community	Residents told. Lower-noise fireworks near homes or animals	Notice copies

Not a complete list. Councils and landowners may set their own conditions.

What we don't know yet: 6 open points

01 • Check locally

Control zones

Which Scottish sites are in a zone this year

Now: ask the council

02 • Guidance, not law

Steward ratio

OPSS says 1 per 250. We found no legal basis

Now: use it as a minimum

03 • Not in force

Scottish days of use

Parts of the 2022 Act were not in force on 20 October

Now: check before next season

04 • Local conditions

Landowner and council terms

They may add conditions for your site

Now: ask in writing

05 • On the day

Weather

Forecasts change and warnings vary by area

Now: read Met Office warnings in full

06 • Northern Ireland

Late licence requests

Closing dates are set by the Department

Now: contact the Department today

Open on 20 October 2026. Check the official sources before acting.



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Key sources: OPSS; HSE; Fireworks Regulations 2004; Scottish Government; nidirect; CAA

Spotted an error? Tell us and we will correct it. General information, not legal advice. Correct as of 20 October 2026.

Work with OTAS

Planning a fireworks display or another outdoor event this season?

Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help

Briefing card • about 1 minute

“Tonight there are three areas: the crowd, the firing zone and the fallout zone where debris lands. Nobody except the firing team goes into the firing zone, and nobody goes into the fallout zone.

If anyone tries to bring fireworks in, they do not come in. If a firework fails to go off, keep everyone back and tell the firing team. Never go near it.

Your post: _____ **Stop signal:** _____

Radio call for help: _____ **First aid at:** _____

If anyone is hurt, call for help on the radio and they will call the emergency services. At the end, keep the exits clear and lit. Any questions?”

Read at every steward briefing. Fill in the blanks first.

Before your display: the checklist, by level

Operational know the three areas; turn away spectators' fireworks; leave misfires alone; keep exits clear.

Tactical walk the site in daylight; end firing on time; recheck the wind; brief every steward; clear up next morning.

Strategic professional operator for F4; site authorised; police and fire told 7 days ahead; roles and insurance in writing.