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## Danbury native killed after explosion at Montana home

By Brian Saxton  
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A 53-year-old Danbury native who enjoyed making fireworks and went to school to study pyrotechnics died Monday after a stockpile of them exploded in his garage in Missoula, Mont.

Missoula police and fire officials said Eugene "Tad" Kolwicz suffered burns on 75 percent of his body when the garage blew up Sunday night.

Witnesses said Kolwicz was burned so badly the skin on his body was peeling off as rescuers tried to douse the flames with blankets.

"He was on fire," Kolwicz's father, Gene Kolwicz, 85, said Tuesday. "It was just horrible."

Missoula Police Det. Chris Shermer, who is investigating the explosion, said the accident happened around 7:30 p.m., just as Kolwicz's wife, Ginny Miller, was returning home from a shopping trip.

"It was not a good thing for her to see," Shermer said. "The garage just blew up, and then the two huge explosions followed by some smaller ones."

Eugene Kolwicz was flown to a burn unit at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, where he died Monday.

"It's a case of a good man gone," said Gene Kolwicz, who also lives in Missoula. "It was all we loved life."

Eugene Kolwicz, who at the time of his death was a fire management specialist for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, was born in Danbury and grew up in New Fairfield. He graduated from Danbury High School in 1971. He went to the University of Montana and graduated with a degree in forestry and decided to stay out west.

Shermer said Kolwicz went to school to learn how to make fireworks and was working on them at the time of the explosion.

Investigators said the garage contained both fireworks and the materials needed to make them.

"We don't know yet what ignited them," Shermer said.



Missoula, Mont., firefighters sort through the scene of Sunday night explosion that seriously injured Danbury native Eugene "Tad" Kolwicz. Monday.

Gene Kolwicz said his son had never had any previous problems while making fireworks.

"He knew how to handle them," Kolwicz said. "We just don't know what happened."

Kolwicz said his son never sold the fireworks but used them for events like the Fourth of July parties for family and friends.

Eugene Kolwicz, an only child, had one daughter, Katie, 23, who is studying at the University Montana.

His parents, Gene and Virginia Kolwicz, moved to Missoula in 1985 to be near him.

His mother, Virginia Kolwicz, who was also born and raised in Danbury, died in 2005 at age 7

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