



AGENDA ITEM

CONSENT CALENDAR

CITY COUNCIL / BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MEETING OF: August 20, 2019

SUBMITTED BY: GREG BENSON *GSB*
FIRE CHIEF

DATE: 7/30/19

ATTACHMENT: FIREWORKS ENFORCEMENT TASK FORCE SUMMARY

SUBJECT: FIREWORKS ENFORCEMENT TASK FORCE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDATION:

For informationl purposes only.

DISCUSSION:

The attached Fireworks Enforcement Task Force Summary report provides the Honorable City Council with a summary of actions taken against the use of illegal fireworks from June 15 - July 7, 2019. The Task Force was formed in response to concerns expressed by residents of Victorville on the negative effect that illegal fireworks were having on their lives and the community. The Task Force utilized a multi-pronged approach including public messaging designed to educate and create community awareness on the dangers of illegal fireworks, as well as neighborhood based enforcement actions. Community feedback on efforts to eliminate illegal fireworks usage was positive with a strong sentiment to increase future enforcement periods. Recommendations from the Task Force for future consideration include increasing citation fines for illegal fireworks, continued use of the anonymous online reporting tool, continuation of neighborhood based enforcement activities and making public the list of residents receiving citations. Further details on the Fireworks Enforcement Task Force activities and additional recommendations are contained in the report.

GB/sp

FINANCE REVIEW

Finance Manager: _____

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Juan Robinson, Public Works Manager
Capt. Rick Bessinger, Police Chief
Greg Benson, Fire Chief

July 31, 2019

Fireworks Enforcement Task Force Summary

Illegal fireworks are a growing problem both nationally and locally. A fire caused by illegal fireworks that occurred in an LMAD on Amethyst Rd. in June 2018 threatened nearby homes. To address the issue, the City of Victorville initiated a pilot enforcement program in July 2018. A Fireworks Enforcement Task Force was again established in June 2019, expanding the pilot. The 2019 Fireworks Enforcement Task Force consisted of personnel from the City of Victorville Code Enforcement, Animal Care & Control, Fire Department, Public Works, and City Manager's office as well the Victorville Sheriff Department. This multi-department Task Force developed a strategy that included a public messaging campaign and enforcement activities. This report provides details about the Fireworks Enforcement Task Force along with results of the messaging campaign and enforcement efforts.

Legal Structure

All fireworks are illegal in the City of Victorville per (13.22.010 [Fireworks Prohibited]). Legal counsel recommended the issuance of Administrative Citations as the primary enforcement tool. Code Enforcement and Animal Care & Control Officers can issue Administrative Citations for observed code infractions. Illegal fireworks in view would be confiscated and turned over to the Victorville Fire Department for secure storage. Sheriff's deputies would be on-hand for Task Force member safety as well as managing any criminal violations.

Public Messaging

Our public messaging strategy included tactics such as press releases, social media posts, portable digital messaging signs, the City website, and the Jumbotron at the Autopark. The portable digital messaging signs were moved throughout the city to maximize message exposure.

The social media messaging campaign that occurred between June 5 and July 6 focused on the following theme areas: fireworks are illegal in the City of Victorville, the threat of fire, risk of bodily injury, the stress on pets and residents suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Following are the number of posts per key message theme.

Theme of Post	No. of Posts
Fireworks are illegal	6 posts
Bodily injury	2 posts
Stress on pets	2 posts
PTSD	2 posts
Threat of fire	2 posts

*Screenshots of the posts are provided in *Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts*.

Additional social media posts provided updates on fire incidents, development of an online reporting tool, and the status of enforcement efforts prior to July 4.

ZenCity, our online media analysis tool, was used to measure public sentiment and response to our social media posts. Metrics indicated that 5,065 interactions with our posts occurred. The overall sentiment was found to be:

- 11% positive
- 11% negative
- 78% neutral

Further analysis found that the Victorville community supported illegal fireworks enforcement. Strong sentiment exists in our community that supports expanded enforcement efforts.

An analysis of 272 Facebook comments indicates:

- 87% supported enforcement
- 61% sought further expansion of enforcement programs
- 6% were against enforcement

- 6% sought increased fines for illegal fireworks violations.
- Support to increase illegal fireworks enforcement efforts and increased fines for violators was expressed.

Enforcement Activities

Task force enforcement activities were conducted by both marked and unmarked Sheriff Patrol units and Fire Department vehicles. Marked units were staffed with a Deputy and Code Enforcement or Animal Control officer. Fire department personnel assisted with fireworks that were confiscated. Enforcement was conducted on the following dates:

- June 14, 15, 21, 22, 28, 29
- July 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Task force units responded to reports of illegal fireworks made to Victorville Police Dispatch, 911 calls, online submissions, and team member observations.

Reporting metrics included:

Reporting means	2019
Police Dispatch & 911	558
Online reporting submission	564
Total	1,122

The online reporting form was viewed 2,791 times, but only 564 online reports were submitted. We will implement changes to the online form that increases a sense of anonymity to encourage more reporting next year.

A breakdown of direct time and costs associated with Task Force enforcement activities is shown.

Department	Hours	Estimated Cost
Code/Animal Control	153	\$6,245
Fire Department	25	\$ 973.20
Sheriff Deputies	224	\$16,914
Portable digital sign rental		\$3,190
Total		\$27,322.20

Animal Control spent additional time in responding to loose dogs as well as in administrative follow up. These amounts do not include the City and Police Department staff time in organizing and planning the Fireworks Task Force program.

Task Force Enforcement Outcomes

The Task Force issued a total of 77 citations and deterrent contacts in 2019 with an associated dollar value of \$6,700 in fines issued. Despite promoting a fine of up to \$1,000, actual citations were issued at \$100 per citation due to a weakness verified in our Code to assess a higher amount. A breakdown is provided below:

- 67 fireworks enforcement citations
- 8 deterrent contacts
- 1 warning
- 1 noise citation

Also, deputies made two arrests during illegal fireworks enforcement activities.

Animal Control officers responded to 97 calls for loose dogs and picked up 30 of those dogs during the enforcement activity period. Animal Control estimates that 40% of the impounded dogs were returned to their owners. Dogs that were unable to be returned were placed for adoption through the Victor Valley Animal Protection League.

The 67 fireworks enforcement citations issued in 2019 are in comparison to eight (8) citations issued during the enforcement pilot program in 2018. The approved process for collecting citations fines will be followed.

A specific address reported in the online reporting tool increased issuance of citations to approximately 50%. Specific locations allowed a directed approach to enforcement.

A total of approximately 3,120 lbs. of illegal fireworks were confiscated. This includes 3,000 lbs. confiscated in April 2019.

Areas for Improvement

An After-Action Review of the 2019 Fireworks Task Force program was conducted to identify improvements for future task forces. A summary of consideration is listed below:

- Strong pro-enforcement sentiment from our community supports increasing the number of task force units.
- Start the illegal fireworks public messaging sooner.
- Add additional portable digital signage.
- Develop an illegal firework enforcement image for program branding.
- Consider producing video shorts of personal testimonials to post on social media and the city website.

- Re-design the online reporting tool to make it easier to enter an address anonymously.
- Because 50 percent of the citations issued were the direct result of the online reporting tool, this form should be used again next year. Additionally, the online reporting form should be a key focus of the public messaging campaign.
- Consider revising the City of Victorville Municipal Code to refer to statutes adopted by the State of California legislature for illegal firework fines. This would increase citations fees to \$1,000 for each offense. Fines can be used to offset enforcement costs and public awareness costs that are incurred as a result of illegal behaviors.
- Consider revising the City of Victorville Municipal Code 13.04.030 Throwing Missiles, to include illegal fireworks and establish a minimum of fine of \$1,000 per occurrence. Encourage people reporting illegal fireworks to provide more specific locations to aid our enforcement efforts.
- Consider making the list of people who are issued citations public through the City website or media.
- Monitor Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace to identify people who are advertising and selling illegal fireworks.
- Post on the City's social media outlets a thank you message to those who reported illegal fireworks.
- Identify a coordinator to capture and monitor citations, deterrents contacts, and other data elements of the enforcement program. This would be a secondary assignment of limited duration best established in the Code Division.

Summary

Illegal fireworks in the City of Victorville create dangerous conditions for fire, injury, pets, and people suffering from PTSD. Compliant residents are aware of the scope of the problem and support increased enforcement activity. Communicating the status and results of enforcement activities with the community is essential. These communications address the skepticism that has been publicly expressed and promote transparency and accountability to the community. Considerations to improve future enforcement activities have been identified. Implementation of these considerations will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of future campaigns. The goal of the Fireworks Enforcement Task Force remains to maintain a healthy, safe, and comfortable lifestyle for all Victorville residents.

Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts

(Illegal) With summer right around the corner, it's a great time for us to remind everyone that all fireworks are prohibited within the #cityofvv. We've formed a Task Force to conduct fireworks enforcement sweeps during the months of June and July. Violators will be fined up to \$1,000 and could receive up to six months in jail. #cityofvvfire Stations will serve as safe havens if you want to voluntarily surrender fireworks without worry of prosecution. Leave the fireworks to the professionals and attend a professionally managed fireworks show like the FREE July Fourth Celebration sponsored by #cityofvv at the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds.

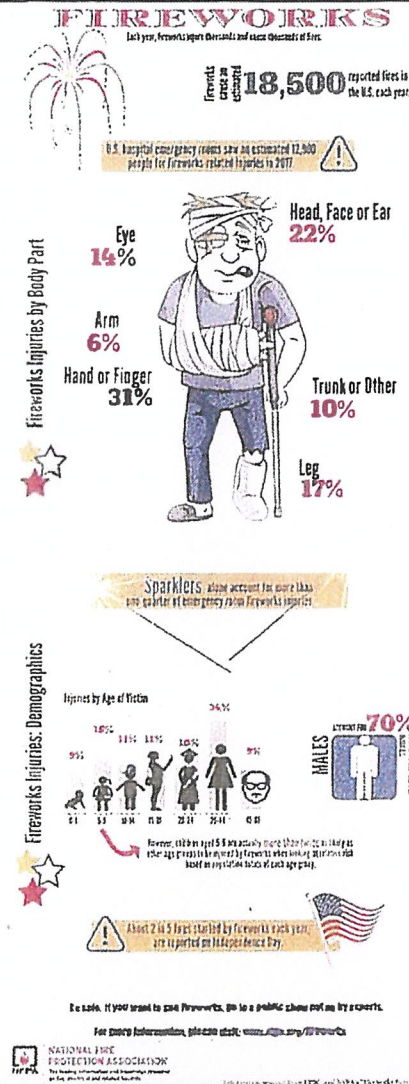
Posted: June 5



Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts

(Bodily Injury) : If not handled properly, fireworks can cause bodily injuries to both adults and children. Fireworks are meant to be enjoyed and the best way to protect your family is to attend public fireworks show and leave the lighting to the professionals. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire

Posted: June 7



(Illegal) Fireworks are illegal in Victorville, and they can cost you! Violators will be fined up to \$1,000 and could receive up to six months in jail. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire

Posted: June 7



Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts


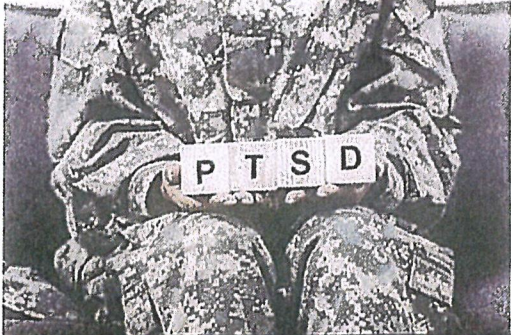

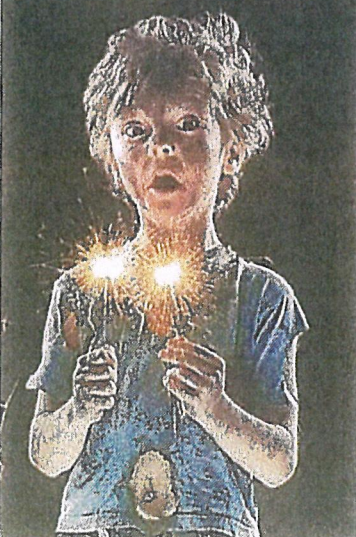
<p>(Threat of Fire): Did you know more fires are reported on July 4th than any other day of the year? According to the National Fire Protection Association. Each year, fireworks cause on average 1,300 structure fires, 300 vehicle fires and nearly 17,000 other fires resulting in thousands of injuries. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 8</p>	
<p>(PTSD) The unexpected booming sounds of fireworks can be a challenge for Veterans, especially those with PTSD. Many Veterans can mentally prepare for planned events, like our annual July Fourth Celebration. Join us in being mindful of our heroes. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 10</p>	
<p>(Stress on Pets): Fireworks displays can be highly stressful on our four legged friends due to the frequent and unexpected explosive sounds. You can help keep your pet safe and calm by bringing them indoors to help distract them from the noise outside. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 12</p>	
<p>(Bodily Injury): Many fireworks injuries are caused due to the misuse of sparklers by young children. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission indicates that sparklers burn at temperatures of about 1,200 degrees-hot enough to melt some metals. Avoid unnecessary medical emergencies and leave the lighting to the professionals. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 13</p>	

Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts


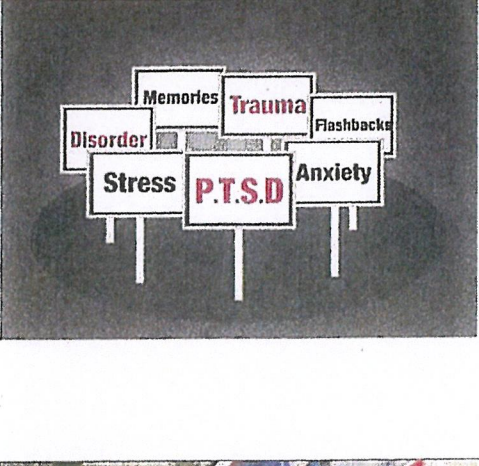

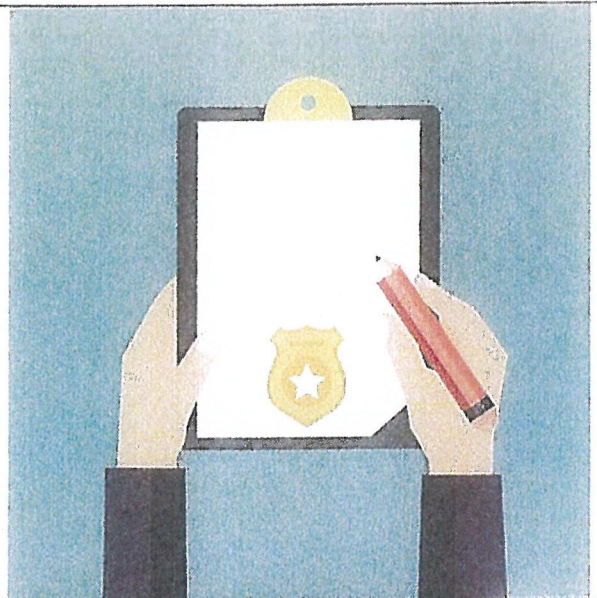
<p>(Threat of fire): Our dry air, climate and landscape make the #cityofvv extremely vulnerable to fires. By refraining from the use of illegal fireworks we can help prevent possible devastation and loss caused by fires. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 18</p>	
<p>(PTSD) During the Fourth of July holiday, the sound of fireworks may be a triggering reminder for the survivor of a devastating mass shooting or other traumatic events. We can show our support by refraining from the use of fireworks. You can report fireworks by going to our City Website at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks or by calling #victorvillepolicedispatch at (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p> <p>Posted: June 24</p>	
<p>(Stress on Pets) Fireworks can cause stress on our pets, as well as service dogs and their handlers. Let's be mindful of our neighbors and those that rely on service animals this holiday season. You can report fireworks by going to our City Website at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks or by calling #victorvillepolicedispatch at (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire</p>	

Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts

(Illegal) We now have an online reporting form to report illegal fireworks that can be accessed by visiting our City Website at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks. It can be challenging to catch someone in the act of using fireworks, but you can help us by providing an exact address and/or cross street. Reports can still be made by calling #cityofvv Police Dispatch at (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. #cityofvvfire

Posted: June 20



(Illegal) As a friendly reminder, the #cityofvv has formed a task force consisting of Sherriff's Department Deputies, Fire Personnel and Officers from the City's Code Enforcement and Animal Control Division to conduct fireworks enforcement sweeps during the months of June and July. You can report fireworks by going to our City Website at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks or by calling the City of Victorville Police Dispatch at (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire

Posted: June 22



Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts

(Illegal) The dangers of illegal fireworks were highlighted on June 23 when #cityofvvfire responded to a vegetation fire in a neighborhood near Amethyst. A row of bushes near a home were on fire with neighbors attempting to extinguish the fire prior to fire department arrival. Witnesses reported illegal fireworks were lit in the immediate area. The #cityofvvFireworks Enforcement Task Force will issue citations up to \$1,000 to any persons observed lighting fireworks and confiscate fireworks. Fireworks can be turned in at any #cityofvvfire Station through our anonymous Safe Haven Program.

Posted: June 28



(Stress on Pets) Did you know that July 5th is one of the busiest days of the year for animal shelters? Ensure that your pet has some form of identification tag or lost-pet device. If you need to report a lost or found pet contact #cityofvv Animal Control vv.city/lostpet. Please be kind to your neighbors, don't use fireworks. You can report fireworks by going to our City Website at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks or by calling the #cityofvv Police Dispatch (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire

Posted: July 2



We hope everyone has a safe and happy 4th of July with friends and family. As a friendly reminder, fireworks of any kind are strictly prohibited in the #cityofvv. Leave the fireworks to the professionals & see our professionally-managed show at the Fairgrounds tonight at 9 p.m. vv.city/July4th. #cityofvvfire

Posted: July 4



Exhibit 1: Social Media Posts

Saturday, July 6 Our Fireworks Enforcement Task Force will continue to conduct regular fireworks enforcement sweeps throughout the month of July. We encourage you to report offenders at victorvilleCA.gov/fireworks or by calling the #cityofvv Police Dispatch at (760) 956-5001. If you experience an emergency, please dial 911. All fireworks are prohibited in the #cityofvv. #cityofvvfire

Posted: July 6



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