

The Impact of Illegal Fireworks on Ventura County Cities

Summary

The Ventura County 2004-2005 Grand Jury investigated the impact of illegal fireworks on each of the cities in Ventura County. Each city was asked a series of questions regarding calls for service to the police department, cost to the police department to enforce fireworks codes, cost to the fire department for stand-by crews or to fight fires caused by fireworks, and the reported source(s) of confiscated fireworks.

For the 2004 fireworks “season,” (as defined by city in the report), the City of Oxnard reported the highest cost of police services, but the City of Simi Valley reported the most calls for service and the highest cost of fire department services.

Police reported the source(s) of confiscated fireworks were China, Fillmore, San Fernando, Culver City, Palm Springs Indian Reservation, Arkansas, Mexico and the Internet.

Background

In July of 2004 the Grand Jury initiated an investigation into the possibility that illegal fireworks have a dangerous and costly impact on each city. The Grand Jury wanted to find out what pyrotechnics were legal, if any, where it was legal to sell and use fireworks, and what the financial impact was on each individual city to either manage the sale and use of fireworks or to enforce laws against such sales and use.

Methodology

The Grand Jury visited all ten cities in Ventura County. Members set up meetings with the city manager, the police chief and the fire chief of each city. Visits began in the City of Fillmore where some sale and use of fireworks is legal. Jurors studied the pertinent California statutes and the city’s ordinances and met with officials from the other nine cities to ask them all the same series of questions. Information requested included the number of calls for service relating to fireworks during the “fireworks season,” the number of injuries or fires during that time, and the cost of enforcing city ordinances prohibiting the sale and use of fireworks.

Findings

- F-01.** California law has established “safe and sane” fireworks standards that allow the sale and use of small fireworks but outlaw the sale and use of larger pyrotechnics by the general public. "Safe and sane" fireworks include cones that shoot showers of sparks up into the air (less than 8 feet), Piccolo Petes and pinwheels. Any fireworks that cause explosions or that rise more than 8 feet into the air are illegal.

F-02. All Ventura County cities ban the sale and use of the larger pyrotechnics except for use by licensed professionals presenting the fireworks shows hosted by the cities.

Fillmore

F-03. The City of Fillmore authorizes the sale and use of "safe and sane" fireworks between the hours of noon on June 28th and noon on July 5th.

F-04. A maximum of 25 vendors is allowed. Most are established repeat vendors.

F-05. Training of vendors is mandatory. They must display signs clearly labeled that the use of the fireworks being sold is only legal in the City of Fillmore. A person must be at least 16 years of age to buy fireworks and must be at least 18 years of age to sell them. Vendors cannot hand the purchased fireworks to a child.

F-06. The State Fire Marshal, who regulates the booth inspection and approves fireworks to be sold, licenses the vendors. The booths are also licensed by the City of Fillmore.

F-07. In addition to Fillmore there are 81 other cities in California that have legalized the selling of "safe and sane" fireworks.

F-08. In 2003, fireworks booths in Fillmore generated \$1.3 million in gross sales.

F-09. Each vendor pays a \$400 concession fee to the city.

F-10. After overhead, consisting of staff time, the cost to process the concession fees and the cost of fire inspections, the remainder of the fee provides a no-entrance-fee community fireworks show.

F-11. The City of Fillmore earns 1% sales tax from fireworks purchases amounting to approximately \$13,000 per year.

F-12. The City of Fillmore confiscates illegal fireworks which are then turned over to the Sheriff's bomb team for destruction.

F-13. The Sheriff's Department monitors the highway for sales of illegal fireworks.

F-14. Fillmore experiences two to three brush fires per year, some due to illegal fireworks. The police department receives many nuisance (noise) calls related to fireworks, however, the problems are 100% attributable to illegal fireworks as opposed to the legal ones.

Oxnard

F-15. In the City of Oxnard all sales and use of fireworks by the public are illegal.

F-16. There were 311 telephone calls for service received by the Oxnard police department that related to illegal fireworks in 2003 and 379 calls in 2004. The time span of these calls was from July 4th to July 5th.

F-17. The police department arrested 3 people and issued 145 citations for illegal fireworks in 2004.

F-18. The police department spent \$40,377 in 2004 enforcing the fireworks ordinances.

- F-19.** There was one injury and no fires attributable to fireworks in 2004. The fire department spent \$1,886 to provide stand-by crews during the "fireworks season."
- F-20.** Persons from whom illegal fireworks were confiscated reported that they had obtained them from China via Mexico, from Fillmore, San Fernando and the Internet.
- F-21.** The police department reported that a new city ordinance that will increase the fine for fireworks violations up to a maximum of \$1,000 is scheduled for final approval by the city in June 2005.

Simi Valley

- F-22.** Simi Valley Police Department reported that there were 638 calls for service relating to fireworks from July 1st to July 8th in 2004.
- F-23.** There were no arrests but some citations were given during that period.
- F-24.** Simi Valley Police Department's Special Operations Unit is responsible for enforcing the fireworks ordinances, but there was no dollar figure available for the cost to the city during this period.
- F-25.** There were no fireworks related injuries or fires in 2004, but the fire department spent \$3,987 for standby crews during fireworks season.
- F-26.** Confiscated fireworks had been obtained from Fillmore, Culver City, San Fernando and the Internet.

Ventura

- F-27.** Ventura Police Department reported 218 fireworks related calls in 2002 (112 of them on July 4th), 407 calls in 2003 (219 on July 4th), and 501 calls in 2004 (201 on July 4th).
- F-28.** The fireworks season is from July 2 to July 5.
- F-29.** No arrests were made and 40 citations were issued during the 2004 season.
- F-30.** The police department spent \$22,808 in overtime in 2004 over the 4th of July weekend.
- F-31.** There were no fires or injuries attributable to fireworks in Ventura in 2004.
- F-32.** The amount spent by the Ventura Fire Department for standby crews in 2004 was \$12,789.
- F-33.** Confiscated fireworks had reportedly been purchased from China, Mexico, Nevada and Fillmore.

Camarillo

- F-34.** The Camarillo Police Department reported 28 fireworks related calls for service in 2001, 27 calls in 2002, 59 calls in 2003 and 51 calls in 2004.
- F-35.** The fireworks season is from July 4 to July 6.
- F-36.** There were four arrests and no citations given during that time span in 2004.
- F-37.** The police department spent \$2,984 in 2004 for fireworks enforcement.

- F-38. There was one fire attributable to fireworks in 2004.
- F-39. Cost to the fire department covering the City of Camarillo was not received by the Grand Jury.
- F-40. Confiscated fireworks came from friends, the Palms Springs Indian Reservation and Tijuana, Mexico.

Moorpark

- F-41. During the one and a half-week fireworks season, there were 32 calls for service to the police department in 2001, 38 calls in 2002, 57 calls in 2003 and 69 calls in 2004.
- F-42. The police reported no arrests or citations for fireworks during 2004.
- F-43. The amount spent by police for enforcement of fireworks codes in 2004 was not received by the Grand Jury.
- F-44. The fire department reported an expenditure of \$1,886 for standby crews in 2004.
- F-45. Confiscated fireworks came from “adjacent states.”

Santa Paula

- F-46. The police department reported that during the approximate one-week fireworks period there were 101 related calls for service in 2001, 128 calls in 2002, 117 calls in 2003 and 205 calls in 2004.
- F-47. There were no arrests or citations for fireworks during 2004.
- F-48. The police department was unable to determine additional police costs for this period in 2004.
- F-49. Santa Paula Fire Department reported no fireworks related injuries or fires in 2004.
- F-50. The extra cost to the fire department during 2004 was not reported to the Grand Jury.
- F-51. Confiscated fireworks reportedly came from the Internet, Arkansas and Mexico.

Port Hueneme

- F-52. The police department reported that during a 2 month fireworks season there were 59 related calls for service in 2001, 11 calls in 2002, 70 calls in 2003 and 50 calls in 2004.
- F-53. There were no arrests and 3 citations in 2004.
- F-54. The police department spent approximately \$500 in fireworks related expenditures in 2004.
- F-55. There were no injuries or fires due to fireworks in 2004. The fire department reported no extra costs for standby crews.
- F-56. Confiscated fireworks reportedly came from Fillmore, Mexico and out of state.

Ojai

- F-57.** From June 20th to July 18th, the Ojai Police Department received 14 fireworks related calls for service in 2001, 22 calls in 2002, 32 calls in 2003 and 24 calls in 2004.
- F-58.** There were 2 arrests made and an unknown number of citations issued in 2004.
- F-59.** The police reported no extra expenditures during the 2004 season.
- F-60.** Information about the number of injuries and fires due to fireworks in 2004 was not received by the Grand Jury.
- F-61.** The fire department spent \$1,886 for standby crews in 2004.
- F-62.** The source(s) of confiscated fireworks was not reported.

Thousand Oaks

- F-63.** Thousand Oaks police reported that, during the 15 days before and after July 4th, there were 136 fireworks related calls for service in 2001, 176 calls in 2002, 187 calls in 2003 and 183 calls in 2004.
- F-64.** The number of arrests in 2004 was reported as five. The number of citations in 2004 due to fireworks was not electronically tracked via the Sheriff's Records Management System, and the agency was unable to verify the number written.
- F-65.** There were no extra expenditures by the police department in 2004 for fireworks related issues.
- F-66.** The fire department's report of the number of injuries and fires during 2004 due to fireworks was not received by the Grand Jury.
- F-67.** \$1,886 was spent by the fire department in 2004 for standby crews.
- F-68.** The source(s) of confiscated fireworks is unknown.

Conclusions

- C-01.** In 2004 there were 2,100 calls for service during the fireworks season. The majority was reported by the City of Simi Valley, followed by the City of Ventura, the City of Oxnard and the City of Santa Paula. (F-16, F-22, F-27, F-34, F-41, F-46, F-52, F-57, F-63)
- C-02.** The ten police departments, to enforce fireworks laws in 2004, spent in excess of \$66,600. The cost was greatest in the City of Oxnard followed by the City of Ventura. (F-18, F-30, F-37, F-54)
- C-03.** The reported cost to fire departments in the county was in excess of \$24,300 in 2004. Of the cities reporting, the greatest sum was spent by the City of Ventura. (F-19, F-25, F-32, F-44, F-61, F-67)
- C-04.** The City of Fillmore was not the only reported source of illegal fireworks. No distinction was made in those reports between the fireworks that are legally

sold in Fillmore and those that are illegal throughout the state. (F-12, F-20, F-26, F-40, F-45, F-51, F-56)

Recommendations

None Noted.

Responses

None Required.