

City of Costa Mesa Police Department Memorandum



DATE: July 14, 2019

TO: Robert Sharpnack, Chief of Police
Bryan Glass, Captain
Paul Beckman, Lieutenant
Ed Everett, Lieutenant

FROM: Jose Morales, Sergeant

SUBJECT: 2019 Fourth of July After-Action Report

The following is the After-Action Report for Fourth of July operations and the six-day period of June 30 through July 5, 2019. The Police Department's operational goals for the Fourth of July holiday were to maximize the department's ability to effectively handle routine and emergency calls-for-service (CFS), while providing a highly visible and proactive approach to illegal fireworks enforcement, and enhanced customer service response for the anticipated increase in Fourth of July holiday related CFS.

The Fire Department partnered with the Police Department on many fronts, including community outreach, public education, social media, and operational enhancements. The Fire Department designated a Battalion Chief (arson investigator) to assist with arson investigations and/or enforcement of illegal fireworks during the holiday.

Community Outreach

Annually, the City makes considerable efforts to inform and educate the general public of the City's fireworks-related policies leading up to and during the Fourth of July holiday. On June 29, July 1, and July 2, 2019, Police Explorers and advisors (19), Fire Department volunteers (22), a police bicycle officer (1), school resource officers (2), and a Fire Department engine company (1) canvassed and distributed informational Fourth of July flyers within 20 "hot spot" areas identified to have higher firework related CFS volume in 2018. Approximately 6,000 door hanger flyers were distributed during these outreach efforts. The door hangers were printed in both English and Spanish. The flyers included language advising of the City's "zero tolerance" policy, the identification of illegal fireworks, hours to discharge "safe and sane" fireworks, a 24-hour Police Department contact phone number to report illegal firework use or suspicious activity, and a declaration stating possession and/or use of illegal fireworks is a crime punishable up to a \$1,000 fine and/or imprisonment. Informational flyers were also distributed at firework stands.

The Fire Department coordinated the distribution of approximately 23,000 informational firework flyers, which were sent out to households via the Mesa Water District's billing cycle in June 2019. Additionally, 75 posters were posted amongst the firework booths and 18,500 flyers were provided to the booths to hand out to fireworks customers.

The City's Parks & Recreation June-September newsletter contained a half-page informational advertisement that was sent out to over 40,000 households.

Social media efforts included Instagram, Twitter, Nixle, Nextdoor, the City's webpage, as well as the respective CMPD and CMFD Facebook pages. They were all utilized extensively to inform the public of the City's stance on illegal firework usage and enforcement.

As in previous years, six electronic LED message boards were strategically placed throughout the city along major thoroughfares advising of the City's stance on illegal firework usage and enforcement. The LED message boards were placed at the following locations:

- Southbound Newport Blvd., north of Mesa Dr.
- Southbound Fairview Rd., north of Adams Ave.
- Northbound Newport Blvd., north of 19th St.
- Northbound Harbor Blvd., north of 19th St.
- Eastbound Adams Ave., west of Albatross Dr.
- Eastbound Victoria St., west of Canyon Dr.

Finally, public service announcements (PSAs) were posted on social media platforms and websites to educate the public on the City's stance on illegal fireworks usage and enforcement. The PSAs included the 2018 joint PSA by Police Chief Sharpnack and Fire Chief Stefano and other PSAs by Fire Chief Stefano and CMFD personnel. The web links are listed below:

<https://www.facebook.com/CostaMesaFireDepartment/videos/2217923935185811/>

<http://www.costamesaca.gov/index.aspx?page=1909>

Police Department Staffing & Deployment

Police Department Patrol Services staffing remained at normal levels throughout the holiday. In order to manage the anticipated increase in CFS for the holiday and prevent from pulling resources from Patrol Services, Directed Enforcement teams were created to augment staffing from July 2 through July 4, 2019.

Directed Enforcement teams were voluntarily filled by officers through overtime shifts on Tuesday, July 2, and Wednesday, July 3, 2019. Directed Enforcement teams on Thursday, July 4, 2019, were established by utilizing and modifying the weekend 3/12 shifts' monthly non-overtime "payback" day and the schedule of two Community Policing Unit officers and two park rangers. Their schedules were flexed accordingly to maximize directed enforcement during peak hours on the actual holiday. Throughout the holiday period, the Directed Enforcement teams were assigned to each of the two police department geographical patrol areas and were tasked specifically with firework-related CFS and proactive high-visibility patrol in and around "hot spot" areas. Directed Enforcement teams worked independently of Patrol operations, yet were available to assist Patrol if a major incident occurred. Directed Enforcement strategies included uniformed officers in both marked and unmarked police vehicles.

Directed Enforcement team staffing and schedules:

- Tuesday, July 2, 2019 (1700-2200 hours):
 - marked units with a two-officer team – 3
 - marked unit with a sergeant – 1
 - CPU officers working as a bike team – 2

- Wednesday, July 3, 2019 (1700-2400 hours):
 - marked units with two-officer team – 3
 - marked unit with a sergeant – 1
 - CPU officers working as a bike team – 2

- Thursday, July 4, 2019 (1200-0200 hours):
 - marked unit with a sergeant (incident commander) – 1
 - marked units with a sergeant – 2
 - marked units with two-officer team – 5
 - marked unit with a CPU officer and park ranger – 1
 - unmarked unit with a two-officer team – 5
 - unmarked unit with a CPU officer and park ranger – 1

Enforcement Strategies

The Police Department utilized the criminal citation process for enforcement of firework-related violations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC). In all cases, violators were cited and released in the field for the applicable misdemeanor charges and were issued a court date to appear at the Orange County Superior Court, West Justice Center, in Westminster. Prior to the Fourth of July holiday, the Police Department collaborated with the City Attorney's Office to work closer in the coordination and prosecution of these cases. All CMMC citations were sent to the City Attorney for review and prosecution.

This was the third year the department utilized undercover detectives from the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) to conduct preemptive operations ahead of the holiday period. Investigative operations were conducted for several weeks leading up to the holiday, resulting in 14 arrests and the seizure of approximately 4,500 lbs. of illegal fireworks.

Fireworks confiscated during the operational period were secured by the Fire Department at Station 4 and later disposed of by the Orange County Sheriff's Bomb Squad.

Police Calls-For-Service

For the six-day operational period (June 30 through July 5, 2019), Communications received a total of 491 firework-related CFS (565 in 2018). Of those, 415 firework-related CFS were dispatched through general broadcasts to area police units (466 in 2018). Further, officers responded to 76 firework-related CFS (99 in 2018). The firework-related CFS workload leading up to the holiday was moderate with a significant increase on the actual holiday. CFS on the holiday generally peaked between 2000 hours to 2300 hours. This firework-related CFS workload was in addition to the normal, non-firework CFS during this same period.

The following table reflects a five-year historical summary of CFS for the Fourth of July holiday operational period:

Firework CFS	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2018/2019 Comparison
Firework General Broadcast	543	857	585	466	415	- 10.9%
Firework w/ Officer Response	194	152	161	99	76	- 23.2%
Total Firework CFS	737	1,009	746	565	491	- 13.1%

Fire Calls for Service

The Fire Department responded to a total of 178 CFS from July 1 through July 5, 2019. On the holiday, the department responded to 32 total calls for service. There were 3 fireworks-related responses on the Fourth of July (2 dumpster fires and 1 small outside fire).

The following table reflects a five-year historical summary of CFS received by the Fire Department over the Fourth of July holiday period:

Fire CFS	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2018/2019 Comparison
July 1 st	39	38	30	25	43	72%
July 2 nd	43	42	38	36	33	- 8%
July 3 rd	35	43	41	32	33	3%
July 4 th	56	40	33	64	32	- 50%
July 5 th	41	30	41	29	37	28%
Total CFS	214	193	183	186	178	- 4%

It should be noted that in the early morning hours of July 8, 2019 (outside of the holiday operational period), a small brush fire was reported at Fairview Park. The location was west of Waldorf School, beyond Fairy Shrimp Vernal Pool #4. The Fire Department quickly extinguished the flames and the cause/origin remain under investigation.

Noteworthy Events & Directed Enforcement Statistics

Outside of the CFS volume related to fireworks, no other noteworthy events occurred. The below statistics solely reflect the efforts of the Directed Enforcement teams:

- Tuesday, July 2, 2019:
 - H&S other cites – 1
 - B&P cites – 1

- Wednesday, July 3, 2019:
 - CMMC firework cites – 2
 - H&S firework cites – 1
 - H&S other cites – 3
 - CVC cites – 3
 - PC and/or warrant arrests – 2

- Thursday, July 4, 2019:
 - CMMC firework cites – 37
 - H&S firework cites – 1
 - H&S other cites – 6
 - CVC cites – 1
 - PC and/or warrant arrests – 2

In total, the department’s directed enforcement efforts resulted in 41 arrests for misdemeanor firework-related violations of the California Health & Safety Code and the Costa Mesa Municipal Code. Additionally, approximately 150 lbs. of illegal fireworks were confiscated. In most cases, violators were cited and released in the field for the applicable misdemeanor charges.

The following table reflects a five-year historical summary of citations/arrests for the Fourth of July holiday operational period:

Enforcement Stats	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2018/2019 Comparison
Citations / Arrests	25/2*	79/0	80**	55	60	9%

* These numbers are only indicative of fireworks related arrests. They do not account for other patrol, traffic, or any other non-firework related arrests.

** In 2017, the use of non-criminal, civil citations was discontinued. All offenders were arrested for criminal violations and released in the field with a written citation. Previous years reported both civil citations and arrests.

Twenty “hot spot” areas were identified from the previous 2018 Fourth of July holiday. In 2019, approximately 20% of the total citations/arrests occurred within the identified “hot spot” areas.

City Approved Street Closures and Block Parties

There were a total of nine City approved street closures and block parties on the holiday. Minimal CFS were received in these areas with no noteworthy events to report or enforcement actions taken.

Logistics

All Directed Enforcement teams utilized the department’s primary Green 1 radio channel during operational periods.

No vehicle or safety equipment issues were noted during the operational periods.

Animal Control

During the holiday period, there were no CFS directly related to fireworks. Animal Control impounds consisted of the following:

- July 1st – 6 cats
- July 2nd – 1 dog
- July 3rd – 3 dogs
- July 4th – 1 dog
- July 5th – 5 dogs, 8 cats

Firework Stands

The Finance Department issues firework stand permits every year to qualified applicants in accordance with City Ordinance and City Council Policy 400-2. Finance issued 32 permits to eligible applicants for 2019 (35 for 2018). The permit fees were waived pursuant to Council Policy 400-2.

Public Services

Public Services staff manufactured and placed firework prohibition signs at the entrances to all City facilities and public parks. This contributed to the absence of any noteworthy firework issues on any City property or in any public parks. Areas of heavy firework debris were swept after the holiday with no added costs. Fireworks companies also assisted with some of the cleanup. Public Services material and personnel costs for temporary signage at public parks and along main thoroughfare streets was approximately \$3,500.

Recommendations

The outreach, staffing, and enforcement strategies used over the last two years have been effective in addressing the CFS and related matters associated to the Fourth of July holiday. The following recommendations are for future deployments:

- Continue with all of the previously outlined public outreach efforts.
- Continue with early, coordinated investigative efforts to root out supply of illegal fireworks coming into the city.
- Identify “hot spot” locations based on previous year CFS.
- Per State Fire Code, ensure firework stands provide informational flyers to each patron, which outline laws pertaining to the use of purchased fireworks.
- Consider broadcasting the Fourth of July PSA video during City Council meetings starting in early June.
- Continue to use the misdemeanor criminal citation/arrest for firework violations.
- Deploy both marked and unmarked units for directed enforcement.
- Consider if the safe deployment of bicycle officers within “hot spots” neighborhoods is a feasible option.
- Increase patrol checks and monitoring of Fairview Park.

Conclusion

The City’s multi-prong approach towards the Fourth of July holiday was developed from the City’s experience and success over previous years. The community outreach, preventative preparations and regulations, and enforcement strategies have contributed to mitigating illegal fireworks within the City and a decrease in firework-related CFS for the third year in a row.