

City of Costa Mesa Police Department Memorandum



DATE: July 11, 2021
TO: Lori Ann Farrell Harrison, City Manager
FROM: Victor Bakkila, Police Captain
Daniel Stefano, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: 2021 FOURTH OF JULY HOLIDAY REPORT

The following report summarizes the 2021 Fourth of July holiday operations and the six-day operational period of June 30 through July 5, 2020. The City's annual operational goals for the Fourth of July holiday are community outreach, education, timely response to routine and emergency calls for service (CFS), high visibility and proactive approach to illegal fireworks enforcement, and enhanced customer service response for the anticipated increase of firework related calls.

Community Outreach

Annually, the City makes considerable efforts to inform and educate the Costa Mesa community of the City's firework policies leading up to and during the Fourth of July holiday.

In June, City Hall, the Costa Mesa Police Department (CMPD) and Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue (CMFR) used social media and other community platforms for community outreach. These platforms included Instagram, Twitter, Nixle, Nextdoor, City webpage, newsletters, and Facebook. Messaging focused extensively on educating the public on fireworks safety, safe & sane fireworks usage, targeted enforcement against sales and possession of illegal fireworks, how to report illegal fireworks and how illegal fireworks can impact veterans and pets.

As an example, CMPD posted a Facebook Live video on how to identify, purchase and safely use safe and sane fireworks shot on location at a fireworks booth. CMFR posted a video on multiple platforms about the impact of fireworks on pets, which was filmed at a local pet day care. CMPD posted photos of a large fireworks seizure during an undercover buy bust.

CMFR coordinated a bilingual fireworks informational insert, which was placed in the May and June water bills and was distributed to 18,500 residents. CMFR also placed information banners on each of the six city fire stations informing the public about illegal firework use and the non-emergency phone number for citizens to call to report illegal fireworks to the Costa Mesa Police Department (CMPD).

The weekend prior to the holiday, June 25-27 and July 1-2, neighborhoods with a high volume of fireworks calls for service from the previous year identified as “hot spots”, were canvased. Personnel from CMPD, CMFR, Costa Mesa Police Explorers and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers canvased these neighborhoods and distributed approximately 6,000 bilingual door hanger pamphlets that outlined applicable fireworks laws and usage information.

CMFR also provided 125 large-print bilingual posters for the 31 Fireworks booths. Fireworks vendors printed for at-purchase distribution an additional 18,500 bilingual handouts.

A public service announcement video from 2020 was also posted on social media, the City’s YouTube channel, and the City’s website:

<https://www.costamesaca.gov/city-hall/city-departments/fire-rescue/fireworks>

As in previous years, six electronic LED message boards were strategically placed throughout the city along major thoroughfares advising of the City’s “zero tolerance” policy on illegal fireworks. This year, we expanded our messaging by deploying two of these boards two-weeks in advance of the holiday weekend near freeway off-ramps. The LED message boards used were previously purchased by CMPD using traffic safety grant funding.

The LED message boards were placed at the following locations:

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

Police Staffing & Deployment

Patrol Services staffing remained at normal levels throughout the holiday operational period and was supplemented by reserve officers and the K9 Unit working on the weekend. No time off was allowed during this period to ensure appropriate staffing levels were deployed.

In addition to normal patrol staffing, extensive overtime was used to significantly increase staffing and create directed enforcement teams. Based on staffing and budgetary factors, Field Operations Division resources were utilized from June 30 through July 4, 2021, to create directed enforcement teams. This consisted of assigning Patrol Services staff to directed enforcement teams on July 30, 2021, on their pre-designated “payback” day and Patrol Services and Community Policing Unit (CPU) staff were used on an overtime basis July 2 through July 4, 2021.

The use of overtime for the three days of directed enforcement consisted of approximately 215 hours of overtime at a cost of approximately \$17,000. This was a significant increase

from last year, when only 25 hours of overtime were used due to COVID budgetary concerns.

Throughout the holiday period, the directed enforcement teams were assigned to each of the two geographical patrol areas and were tasked specifically with firework related CFS and proactive high-visibility patrols in and around “hot spots” and block party areas. Directed enforcement teams worked in uniform and used a combination of marked police cars and undercover cars, as well as bicycles to conduct patrol. The assigned personnel worked independently of Patrol Services operations; however, they were available to assist if required for any major incidents.

Directed enforcement team staffing and schedules:

- Thursday, July 1, 2021 (1800-0000 hours)
 - Total personnel assigned: 9
 - Marked units – 2
 - Unmarked units - 3
- Friday, July 2, 2021 (1800-0000 hours)
 - Total personnel assigned: 5
 - Marked units - 1
 - Unmarked units - 2
- Saturday, July 3, 2021 (1800-0000 hours)
 - Total personnel assigned: 11
 - Marked units - 3
 - Unmarked units - 4
- Sunday, July 4, 2021 (1800-0200 hours)
 - Total personnel assigned: 18
 - Marked units - 6
 - Unmarked units - 4

Enforcement Strategies

The Police Department used the criminal citation process for enforcement of firework-related violations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC) and the California Health and Safety Code (H&S). 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 citations will be sent to the City Attorney for review and prosecution.

This was the fifth year the department conducted investigative operations with undercover detectives from the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) ahead of the holiday period. Investigative operations were conducted leading up to the holiday operational period, but were limited due to previous and on-going investigative obligations. The operations

conducted resulted in seven felony arrests and the seizure of approximately 1,706 pounds of illegal fireworks. This was an 81% increase from the previous year.

Fireworks confiscated during the operational period were secured by the Costa Mesa Corporation Yard and later disposed of by the Orange County Sheriff’s Department (OCSD) Bomb Squad. Any fireworks deemed an explosive were collected at the scene by the OCSD Bomb Squad for safe disposal.

Police Calls For Service

This year, the department experienced the lowest level of firework related CFS in the past five years. During the six-day operational period (June 30 through July 5, 2021), Communications received a total of 437 firework related CFS. Of the calls, 410 of them were dispatched through general broadcasts to police units. Officers were dispatched and responded to the remaining 27 firework related CFS. The fireworks calls peaked between 2000 hours to 2300 hours and were in addition to non-firework related CFS during the holiday period.

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

Firework CFS	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2020/2021 Comparison
Firework General Broadcast	585	466	415	512	410	-18%
Firework w/ Officer Response	161	99	76	169	27	-84%
Total Firework CFS	746	565	491	681	437	-34%

Fire & Rescue Calls for Service

CMFR responded to a total of 196 CFS from July 1 through July 5, 2021. Specifically on July 4, 2021, CMFR responded to 50 CFS. The majority of calls for service were standard medical aid and fire type responses. Two calls on July 4, 2021, were dumpster/trash fires that were related to fireworks. Nine other fires occurred during this period, but fireworks could not be positively determined as the cause of the incident.

CMFR staff continued to respond to My Costa Mesa Illegal Fireworks complaints and direct the submitters to notify the CMPD non-emergency line of any illegal activity. The following table reflects a five-year historical summary of My Costa Mesa Illegal fireworks complaints received by CMFR leading into and over the holiday period:

My Costa Mesa Illegal Fireworks Complaints	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2020/2021 Comparison
May	1	2	1	8	6	-25%
June	12	8	17	45	10	-78%
July 1-5	20	10	22	29	9	-69%
Total Complaints	33	20	40	82	25	-70%

In terms of significant injuries related to fireworks, a late report was taken at the CMPD front desk related to an incident that occurred during the early morning hours of July 5, 2021, when a firework accidentally struck the victim in the face, knocking out several teeth. The victim called 911 when the incident occurred, but later canceled the call and instead was driven to the hospital by friends.

The following table reflects a five-year historical summary of CFS received by CMFR over the holiday period:

Fire CFS	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2020/2021 Comparison
July 1 st	30	25	43	26	39	+50%
July 2 nd	38	36	33	43	38	-12%
July 3 rd	41	32	33	47	38	-19%
July 4 th	33	64	32	47	50	+6%
July 5 th	41	29	37	36	31	-14%
Total CFS	183	186	178	199	196	-2%

Noteworthy Events & Directed Enforcement Statistics

The below statistics solely reflect the efforts of the directed enforcement teams:

- Thursday, July 1, 2021:
 - CMMC firework cites – 1
 - H&S firework cites – 0
- Friday, July 2, 2021:
 - CMMC firework cites – 0
 - H&S firework cites – 0
- Saturday, July 3, 2021:
 - CMMC firework cites – 1
 - H&S firework cites – 0
- Sunday, July 4, 2021:
 - CMMC firework cites – 26
 - H&S firework cites – 1

In total, the Police Department’s directed enforcement efforts resulted in 29 arrests for firework related violations of the California Health & Safety and Costa Mesa Municipal Codes. Further, approximately 200 lbs. of illegal fireworks were confiscated. In all cases, violators were cited and released in the field for the applicable charges.

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

Enforcement Stats	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2019/2020 Comparison
Citations / Arrests	80	55	60	37	29	-22%

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

Twenty “hot spot” areas were identified from the previous 2020 Fourth of July holiday. In 2021, approximately 30% of the total citations/arrests occurred within the identified “hot spot” areas.

City Approved Street Closures and Block Parties

There were seven 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

An additional Communications Officer was used to operate an alternate radio channel for the personnel working fireworks directed enforcement on July 4, 2021.

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

Animal Control

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

- July 1st – 0 dogs
- July 2nd – 3 dogs
- July 3rd – 1 dog
- July 4th – 1 dog
- July 5th – 1 dog

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 31 permits to eligible applicants for 2021. This is the same number of permits previously issued in 2020. The permit fees were waived pursuant to Council Policy 400-2.

CMFR conducted fireworks stand orientation with all of the vendors and booth operators. Further, CMFR's Community Risk Reduction Division worked closely with the Building Department for site inspections of each fireworks booth, which included the posting of bilingual health and safety posters at each booth.

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.

Recommendations

The outreach, staffing, and enforcement strategies used over the last four 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 to provide a robust and multipronged public outreach campaign.
- Expand use of city owned and rented message boards to two weeks prior.
- Expand undercover operations to purchase illegal fireworks prior to the holiday.
- Continue to use the misdemeanor criminal citation/arrest for firework violations.
- 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 firework-related CFS to the lowest levels in five years.