

# City of Costa Mesa Police Department Memorandum



DATE: July 14, 2022

TO: Lori Ann Farrell Harrison, City Manager

FROM: Ronald Lawrence, Chief of Police  
Daniel Stefano, Fire Chief

**SUBJECT: 2022 Fourth of July Holiday Report**

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The following is the After-Action Report for Fourth of July operations and the six-day period of June 30th through July 5, 2022. The Police Department's operational goals for the Fourth of July holiday were to maintain our priority of life-safety while maximizing the department's ability to effectively handle emergency as well as routine calls-for-service (CFS). Providing a highly visible and proactive approach to illegal fireworks enforcement enhanced customer service response for the increase in Fourth of July holiday related CFS.

The Costa Mesa Fire & Rescue 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 laws leading up to and during the Fourth of July holiday. On July 1st and July 2nd, 2022, police explorers and advisors (8) and fire volunteers/staff (12) canvassed and distributed informational Fourth of July flyers within "hot spot" neighborhoods identified to have higher firework related CFS in 2021. Approximately 6,700 door hanger flyers were distributed during outreach efforts. Door hangers printed in both English and Spanish, included advisements of the City's "zero tolerance" policy, how to identify illegal fireworks, lawful hours to discharge "safe and sane" fireworks, a 24-hour Police Department contact phone number to report illegal firework use/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 15,500 informational firework flyers, which were mailed to households via the Mesa Water District's billing cycle in June 2022. Additionally, 125 posters were posted at firework booths and 21,500 flyers were provided to the booths to hand out to customers.

Social media efforts included Instagram, Twitter, Nixle, Nextdoor, the City's webpage, as well as CMPD and CMF&R Facebook pages, utilized extensively to inform the public of the City's policies on illegal firework usage and enforcement.

Electronic LED message boards were deployed throughout the city along major thoroughfares advising of the City's stance on illegal firework usage and enforcement. Two message boards belonging to the city were inoperable and did not get fixed by this operation. Three message boards were rented from BC Traffic from June 16 to July 5, 2022, at a cost of \$5,055. In total, four LED message boards were placed at the following locations:

- Southbound Newport Blvd., north of Mesa Dr.
- Southbound Newport Blvd., north of 19<sup>th</sup> St.
- Northbound Harbor Blvd., south of Victoria St.
- Eastbound Adams Ave., west of Albatross Dr.

The following locations did not have message boards, but should be considered for 2023.

- Southbound Fairview Rd., north of Adams Ave
- Eastbound Victoria St., east of Canyon Dr.

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.

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 a video by Police Chief Lawrence and Fire Chief Stefano, one PSA from the Fire Department, and one PSA from the City. The web links are listed below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4WjrdLeJMc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDR8f2kUQiA>

CMPD posted several photos of large fireworks seizures from undercover buy busts. This resulted in an article in the local newspaper and subsequently two news stories before Independence Day:

<https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/story/2022-06-11/costa-mesa-police-and-fire-dampen-plans-of-those-selling-discharging-illegal-fireworks>

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/on-air/fireworks-stands-pop-up-across-orange-county/2929649/>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/video/officers-confiscate-8600-pounds-of-illegal-fireworks-in-orange-county-ahead-of-july-4th/?intcid=CNM-00-10abd1h#x>

## **Police Department Staffing & Deployment**

Police patrol staffing remained at normal levels throughout the holiday. To manage anticipated increase in CFS for the holiday and prevent pulling resources from Patrol Services, Directed Enforcement teams were created to augment staffing from July 1st through July 4th, 2022. It should be noted, only July 2-4 were identified as mandatory workdays in the shift selection memorandum.

Overtime use was markedly lower than previous years. The new 3/12 patrol schedule allowed the department to flex buyback days without incurring overtime. Overtime was reduced from 215 hours (2021) to 10 hours (2022) at an overtime savings of more than \$16,000.

Directed Enforcement (D.E.) teams were established by modifying officers scheduled non-overtime “buyback” days occurring in the same 28 day pay cycle (June 19<sup>th</sup>- July 16<sup>th</sup>). D.E. officers were deployed as uniformed two-person teams, in either marked or unmarked units, between the hours of 1600 and 0200. Throughout the holiday period, the D.E. 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. D.E. teams worked independently of Patrol operations, yet were available to assist Patrol if a major incident occurred.

Directed Enforcement team staffing and schedules:

- Friday, July 1, 2022 (1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 6
  - ❖ marked units - 1
  - ❖ unmarked units - 2
- Saturday, July 2, 2022 (1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 8
  - ❖ Marked units - 1
  - ❖ Unmarked units - 3
- Sunday, July 3, 2022 (1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 8
  - ❖ Marked units - 4(single officer)
  - ❖ Unmarked units – 2
- Monday, July 4, 2022 (1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 10
  - ❖ Marked units - 2
  - ❖ Unmarked units – 3

## **Enforcement Strategies**

The Police Department utilized the criminal citation process for enforcement of firework-related violations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code (CMMC). In most 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 coordinate and prosecute these cases. All CMMC citations were sent to the City Attorney for review and prosecution.

Undercover detectives from the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) conducted preemptive operations ahead of the holiday period. Ten investigative operations were conducted for weeks leading up to the holiday, resulting in 19 felony arrests and seizure of approximately 3,204 lbs. of illegal fireworks and one firearm.

### **Police Calls-For-Service**

For the operational period (June 30 through July 5, 2022), Communications received a total of 654 firework-related CFS (an increase from the 437 received in 2021). Firework-related CFS workload leading up to the holiday was light/moderate with a significant increase on the actual holiday. CFS on the holiday generally peaked between 2000 hours to 2300 hours. Some CFS were “heard only” general area broadcast, while other callers were able to provide more specific details and/or visualization on locations generating a specific response.

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

| <b>Firework CFS</b>          | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2021/2022 Comparison</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Firework General Broadcast   | 466         | 415         | 499         | 410         | 598         | +45%                        |
| Firework w/ Officer Response | 99          | 76          | 169         | 27          | 56          | +107%                       |
| <b>Total Firework CFS</b>    | <b>565</b>  | <b>491</b>  | <b>668</b>  | <b>437</b>  | <b>654</b>  | <b>+49%</b>                 |

### **Fire Calls for Service**

The Fire Department responded to a total of 239 CFS from July 1 through July 5, 2022. On the holiday, the department responded to 45 total calls for service. There were eight fireworks-related responses on the Fourth of July.

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

| <b>Fire CFS</b>      | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2021/2022 Comparison</b> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| July 1 <sup>st</sup> | 25          | 43          | 26          | 39          | 40          | +2.5%                       |
| July 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 36          | 33          | 43          | 38          | 51          | +34%                        |
| July 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 32          | 33          | 47          | 38          | 35          | -7.8%                       |
| July 4 <sup>th</sup> | 64          | 32          | 47          | 50          | 40          | -20%                        |
| July 5 <sup>th</sup> | 29          | 37          | 36          | 31          | 54          | +74%                        |
| <b>Total CFS</b>     | <b>186</b>  | <b>178</b>  | <b>199</b>  | <b>196</b>  | <b>220</b>  | <b>+12%</b>                 |

CMFR staff continued to respond to the “My Costa Mesa” app 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 app Illegal fireworks complaints received by CMFR leading into and over the holiday period:

| <b>“My Costa Mesa” app<br/>Illegal<br/>Fireworks<br/>Complaints</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>2020/2021 Comparison</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| May                                                                 | 2           | 1           | 8           | 6           | 4           | -33%                        |
| June                                                                | 8           | 17          | 45          | 10          | 13          | +30%                        |
| July 1-5                                                            | 10          | 22          | 29          | 9           | 6           | -33%                        |
| <b>Total<br/>Complaints</b>                                         | <b>20</b>   | <b>40</b>   | <b>82</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>24</b>   | <b>-4%</b>                  |

**Noteworthy Events & Directed Enforcement Statistics**

The Fire Department and CMPD responded to two structure fires originating from trash/dumpster fires, six trash/dumpster fires, three bush/grass fires, and one fire due to an ignited box of fireworks.

- The Special Investigations Unit made 19 felony arrests and seized approximately 3,204 lbs. of illegal fireworks and one firearm.
- The Directed Enforcement teams issued a total of ten (10) CMMC misdemeanor citations for illegal fireworks and sieved approximately 93 lbs. of illegal fireworks.

Twenty “hot spot” areas were identified from previous Fourth of July holidays. In 2022, approximately 50% of the total citations/arrests occurred within the identified “hot spot” areas.

**City Approved Street Closures and Block Parties**

There were a total of eight (8) 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.

**Animal Control**

During the holiday operational period, there were nine (9) CFS directly related to fireworks for loose animals (dogs). Five (5) loose dogs were located, taken into custody and safely returned to their owners. IN addition, eleven (11) cats were also recovered and returned to their owners.

**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 2022 (31 for 2021).

## **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 with previously outlined public outreach efforts.
- Continue coordinated investigative efforts to reduce 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.
- Consider moving all D.E. staffing for 2023 to July 3 and July 4. CFS were minimal for July 1 and 2 in 2022.
- Continue to deploy D.E. officers in both marked and unmarked units for directed enforcement.

## **Conclusion**

The City’s multi-prong approach for the Fourth of July holiday was developed from staff 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. In total, SIU made 19 felony arrests and confiscated 3,204 pounds of illegal fireworks. D.E. from July 1-4, resulted in 10 misdemeanor arrests and the confiscation of approximately 93 pounds of illegal fireworks. Calls-for-service for both police and fire increased from 2021. The majority of those calls were received Sunday, July 3, and Monday, July 4. The most plausible explanation is citizen fatigue due to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July landing on a Monday; which contributed to four days of celebration and firework activity.