

# City of Costa Mesa Police Department Memorandum



DATE: August 19, 2024

TO: Lori Ann Farrell Harrison, City Manager

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

**SUBJECT: 2024 Fourth of July Holiday Report**

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The following is the After-Action Report for Fourth of July operations for the six-day period of June 29th through July 5, 2024. 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 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 about the City's fireworks-related policies leading up to and during the Fourth of July holiday. On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Police Explorers and advisors (11) and Fire volunteers/staff canvassed and distributed informational Fourth of July flyers within "hot spot" neighborhoods identified to have higher firework related CFS volume from prior years. Approximately 2,500 door-hanger-style flyers were distributed during these outreach efforts. There were also 2,500 door-hanger-style fliers passed out during the Fish Fry Festival. 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.

As in previous years, four (4) 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., south of Mesa Dr.
- Southbound Newport Blvd., north of 19<sup>th</sup> St.
- Eastbound Adams Ave., west of Albatross Dr.
- Eastbound Victoria St., west of Pacific Ave/Valley Rd.

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. 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 PSA by Chief of Police Ron Lawrence, Fire Chief Dan Steffano, and other announcements from CMFD personnel. The web link is listed below:

[\(2\) Facebook](#)

There were also posts on social media about illegal fireworks enforcement, how to ease the overload on our Communication Center, and tips for pet owners.

### **Police Department Staffing & Deployment**

Police Department Patrol Services staffing remained at normal levels throughout the holiday. To manage the anticipated increase in CFS for the holiday and prevent pulling resources from Patrol Services, directed enforcement teams were created to augment staffing from June 28th, 2024, through July 4th, 2024.

Directed enforcement teams were established by modifying officer's scheduled non-overtime "buyback" days occurring in the same 28-day pay cycle (June 16<sup>th</sup>- July 28<sup>th</sup>). Officers assigned to directed enforcement were deployed as uniformed, two-person teams, in either marked or unmarked police vehicles. Friday, June 28, 2024, did not have any buy-back officers assigned. The directed enforcement for that day was canceled due to officers not filling the voluntary overtime positions.

Throughout the holiday period, the directed enforcement teams were assigned to the two police department's 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.

Additionally, directed enforcement personnel were assigned to provide event security and respond to calls for service related to the City's Independence Holiday event on July 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Orange County Fairgrounds.

Directed Enforcement team staffing and scheduling:

- Saturday, June 29, 2024 (1400-0230 hours). Total personnel assigned: 5
- Tuesday, July 2, 2024 (0600-1600 & 1400-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 12

- Wednesday, July 3, 2024 (1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 13
- Thursday, July 4, 2024 (1000-2000 & 1600-0200 hours). Total personnel assigned: 15

**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 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 eighth year the department utilized undercover detectives from the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) to conduct buy-bust operations ahead of the holiday period. Fifteen investigative operations were conducted for several weeks leading up to the holiday, resulting in five misdemeanor arrests and the seizure of approximately 2623 lbs. of illegal fireworks.

Fireworks confiscated during the operational period were secured utilizing the fire cabinets at the Police Department 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, 2024), CMPD Communications received a total of 336 firework-related CFS. Of those, 289 fireworks related CFS were dispatched through general broadcasts to area police units. Further, officers responded to 47 fireworks related CFS where police contact was requested by the reporting party. The fireworks related CFS workload leading up to the holiday was light with a significant increase on the actual holiday. CFS on the holiday generally peaked between 2000 hours to 2200 hours. The fireworks 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:

<b>Firework CFS</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023/2024 Comparison</b>
Firework General Broadcast	499	410	598	417	289	-31%
Firework w/ Officer Response	169	27	56	45	47	-29%
<b>Total Firework CFS</b>	<b>668</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>-30%</b>

**Fire Calls for Service**

Costa Mesa Fire and Rescue (CMFR) responded to a total of 262 CFS from July 1 through July 5, 2024. On the holiday, the CMFR responded to 64 CFS. There were 10 fireworks-related fires 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:

Fire CFS	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2023/2024 Comparison
July 1 <sup>st</sup>	26	39	49	49	41	-16%
July 2 <sup>nd</sup>	43	38	54	55	38	-31%
July 3 <sup>rd</sup>	47	38	37	38	58	52%
July 4 <sup>th</sup>	47	50	45	73	62	-15%
July 5 <sup>th</sup>	36	32	55	54	50	-7.5%
<b>Total CFS</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>-7.5%</b>

**Noteworthy Events & Directed Enforcement Statistics**

From July 4<sup>th</sup>, 0600 hours to July 5<sup>th</sup>, 0600 hours, the Fire Department and CMPD responded to nine trash/dumpster fires, one bush/grass fires, four tree fires, three still alarms, and 2 fire alarms.

The below statistics solely reflect the efforts of the Directed Enforcement teams:

	6/30/2024	7/1/2024	7/2/2024	7/3/2024	7/04/2024
Fireworks CFS	5	0	6	7	11
Fireworks GB	12	16	19	28	197
Citations Issued	0	0	0	1	3
Fireworks Related Report Numbers				24-008883	24-008916 24-008917 24-008919 24-008925

In total, the department’s directed enforcement efforts resulted in 4 arrests for misdemeanor firework-related violations of the Costa Mesa Municipal Code. Additionally, approximately 100 lbs. of illegal fireworks were confiscated by directed enforcement personnel. In all cases, violators were cited and released in the field for the applicable misdemeanor charges.

It should be noted that two major incidents diverted personnel away from fireworks enforcement efforts:

- On 7/3/2024, 7 officers and two sergeants on directed enforcement were assigned to the City of Costa Mesa’s Independence Day celebration at the Orange County Fairgrounds. This is the second year that CMPD personnel have assisted with this event by providing an increased police presence to ensure safety for the thousands in attendance.

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

<b>Enforcement Stats</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023/2024 Comparison</b>
Citations / Arrests	38	29	10	2	4	100%

**City Approved Street Closures and Block Parties**

There was a total of nine (9) 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**

Directed Enforcement teams utilized the department’s primary Green 1 radio channel during operational periods from June 28 to July 4, 2024.

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

**Animal Control**

Daily Animal Control impounds consisted of the following:

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DOGS</b>	<b>CATS</b>
<b>JUNE 30<sup>TH</sup></b>	1	1
<b>JULY 1<sup>ST</sup></b>	0	1
<b>JULY 2<sup>ND</sup></b>	0	6
<b>JULY 3<sup>RD</sup></b>	0	2
<b>JULY 4<sup>TH</sup></b>	0	0
<b>JULY 5<sup>TH</sup></b>	1	0

**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 2024 (31 for 2023). 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.

**Recommendations**

The outreach, staffing, and enforcement strategies used over the last six (6) 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 reduce the supply of illegal fireworks coming into the city.
- Identify “hot spot” locations based on the previous year's CFS.
- Per the 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.
- Continue to deploy officers, during their Buy-Back shifts, as D.E. officers in both marked and unmarked units for directed enforcement to minimize overtime and maximize deployed personnel.
- Coordinate planning earlier with city personnel and police department personnel regarding staffing for the City's July 3<sup>rd</sup> Fireworks event.

### **Conclusion**

The City's multi-prong approach toward the Fourth of July holiday was based on the City's experience and success over previous years. The City saw a 30% decrease in fireworks related CFS this year as compared to last year, 2023; furthermore, it was the second lowest CFS level in past five years. The community outreach and fireworks events, preventative preparations and regulations, and enforcement strategies strongly contributed to reducing the impact of illegal fireworks within the City.