

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

Crackdown on Illegal Fireworks as County Boosts Fines for First Offenses to \$1,000

Public safety, threat of wildfire prompt Board of Supervisors to increase fines tenfold

Redwood City – Light a match and get caught in a flash.

That’s the message from the County of San Mateo to anyone thinking about setting off illegal fireworks.

The Board of Supervisors [this week increased fines tenfold](#) to \$1,000 for any violation of the County’s strict anti-fireworks laws. The Sheriff’s Office, meanwhile, vows to crackdown on violators as a growing number of residents complain about explosions, smoke and noise, and one spark could easily erupt into a wildfire in the drought-stricken hills.

All fireworks are illegal to possess, sell or use in the unincorporated areas of San Mateo County. This includes fireworks labeled “safe and sane,” such as sparklers, fountains, snakes and smoke balls.

The County will launch a social media and advertising campaign to inform the public about the new and stiffer penalties. While the hope is that would-be violators will put the matches aside, local law enforcement agencies are gearing up for enforcement as the Fourth of July approaches.

“I have heard from my constituents about the number of unpermitted fireworks going off, not only near and during the July 4th holiday, but even now,” said Supervisor Warren Slocum, who co-sponsored the ordinance.

“They are very concerned for their safety and that of their neighborhood. So am I – and that is why this new ordinance with the increased fines is so important,” he said.

Under a new strict fine structure, anyone who violates the [County's Fireworks Ordinance](#) – they possess, store, use or sell illegal fireworks – can receive a \$1,000 fine for each violation. That is 10 times the prior fine for a first offense.

Violators who cause a serious injury or property damage in excess of \$1,000 can now be punished with a misdemeanor with a \$1,000 fine and up to six months in jail.

The ordinance also holds owners accountable if violations occur on their property.

“The use of fireworks is very disruptive to our communities,” said San Mateo County Sheriff Carlos Bolanos.

“We understand that families want to celebrate, especially as COVID restrictions are eased, however fireworks are not only illegal, they can result in serious injuries and the destruction of property,” he said. “If you see fireworks being used, please report their use to your local law enforcement agency.”

Unpermitted fireworks pose a fire risk at a time when the state and county are recovering from one of the most devastating fire seasons on record. In 2020, according to Cal Fire, nearly 10,000 fires burned over 4.2 million acres, making the year the largest wildfire season recorded in California's modern history.

The CZU Lightning Complex fires that began with lightning strikes in August 2020 burned nearly 90,000 acres of land in San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties and damaged or destroyed more than 1,600 structures.

“We fully support these new county fireworks restrictions in an effort prevent accidental injuries and reduce the chances of wildfires breaking out locally,” said Deputy Chief Jonathan Cox of CalFire's San Mateo County division.

“With over 90 percent of all wildfires in California being caused by human activity, we believe these restrictions are more important than ever to protect the communities we serve,” Cox said. “This is especially important as we enter another active fire season.”

An estimated 10,000 injuries treated in hospitals were caused by fireworks nationwide in 2019, according to the U.S. Products Safety Commission. Children younger than 15 years of age accounted for 36 percent – more than one out of every three – of the estimated fireworks-related injuries.

Nearly three out of four fireworks-related injuries occur in the two weeks before and two weeks after the Fourth of July holiday.

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO



The last time the County updated the Fireworks Ordinance was 35 years ago.

"Because of Climate Change and prolonged drought our fire season is longer and more dangerous than ever and that is why it is important to update our fireworks ordinance to prevent a catastrophic wildfire," said Supervisor Don Horsley, who co-sponsored the ordinance.

"Ultimately, fireworks can be the cause of fires, quickly becoming a health and safety hazard. With the danger of wildfire an ever-present concern, updating our ordinances to better deter against the use of illegal fireworks helps protect our forests, families, and communities," he said.

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