

Salinas Californian Soapbox
Steve McShane, Salinas City Councilman, District 3
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Safe and Sane Firework Season Begins

It's been nearly four years since 2014 when this community agreed to "Safe & Sane Fireworks" and indeed, we have had a lot to learn. Without question, the volume of fireworks during the 4th of July holiday has gone up. As a result, so has the feedback to our fire marshal, city leadership and neighborhood groups.

During the summer of 2013, Mayor Joe Gunter tasked the City's Fireworks Subcommittee to explore feedback on the topic of better regulating fireworks in Salinas. The committee was staffed by Fire Chief Ed Rodriguez, Deputy Police Chief Dan Perez, City Manager Ray Corpuz and City Attorney Chris Callahan. Almost immediately, I was flooded with feedback from constituents in South Salinas calling for either more regulation, or an outright ban.

The more vocal constituents feel that the introduction of legal fireworks opens the floodgates to illegal fireworks. Further, the increase in volume of fireworks, makes for a longer celebration often lasting weeks. Residents cited numerous concerns, including countless stories medicated pets and lack of sleep, not to mention worries over dry shake roofs catching fire. Ultimately, the fire chief made it clear that he supported an all-out ban in the city.

The cries for a ban were balanced by those that support the community spirit and neighbors coming together over frosty beverages and barbecues during celebrations. More impressive was the long list of charities that have benefited from tens of thousands of dollars raised through the sale of fireworks. The city's largest supplier, TNT Fireworks, was present at every subcommittee meeting and played a key role in brokering the solutions for the 2014 season.

Early in our meetings as a subcommittee, it became apparent we had not done enough to prepare for and support a community with legal fireworks. I am pleased to report I was able to play a key role in four major solutions reported to and adopted by City Council as follows:

- 1.) Enhanced educational material in English and Spanish
- 2.) Increased delivery of awareness / educational material to schools & community groups at least two weeks earlier than in previous years. This will include special signage.
- 3.) Increased patrol / enforcement and outreach efforts on the part of law enforcement groups at least two weeks earlier than previous years.
- 4.) A new protocol for registering block parties so that proper education & communication is in place for safety and respect for others.

One important finding of the committee is that special taxes on fireworks collected by the City during the sale of fireworks had not all be used in previous years. Further, strategic planning for these funds has never been done. The fire chief committed to planning and careful execution of spending for outreach and regulation of fireworks.

For the time being, "Safe and Sane" fireworks remain in Salinas. Use of illegal fireworks is not tolerated and those caught will be issued a minimum of a \$1,000 fine. I am doing my part as your elected official to ask that we keep in mind safety and respect for others and their property this season. I also welcome your feedback as it is your City Council's job to look after topics like this one.

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