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COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNTY OF MAUI
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April 19, 2021

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OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY CLERK

Ms. Kathy L. Kaohu, County Clerk
Office of the County Clerk
County of Maui
Wailuku, Hawaii 96793

Dear Ms. Kaohu:

SUBJECT: ILLEGAL FIREWORKS REPORTING APP

I am placing the matter relating to a downloadable application for reporting illegal fireworks on the next Council meeting agenda.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alice L. Lee", is written over a horizontal line.

ALICE L. LEE
Council Chair

Attachment

COUNTY COMMUNICATION NO. 21-225

App aids in crackdown on illegal fireworks

San Bernardino ramps up tool to collect tips on the sale and use of pyrotechnics weeks after a blast kills two.



A FIRE CREW treats David Nguyen, who was injured when he fled his Ontario home after fireworks set off a massive explosion in the neighborhood in March. (Irfan Khan Los Angeles Times)

By Lila Seidman

San Bernardino County fire officials are spreading the word about a new system for reporting illegal fireworks, less than a month after an explosion in Ontario left two people dead and caused more than \$3 million in damage.

Residents can anonymously report the use and sale of illegal fireworks through an online portal that can help fire officials better track activities and identify culprits, according to county Fire Marshal Mike Horton.

Reports collected through the app will go into a database that is viewable by fire and law enforcement agencies, he said. Those reports will be mapped and can be used to direct patrols to heavy-use areas.

Owners of homes where fireworks are observed — including in photos that can be uploaded to the app — will be automatically sent a \$1,250 citation through the system, Horton said.

Property owners will be on the hook if their tenants are caught using fireworks, he added.

“We need the community to take responsibility and stop using dangerous and illegal fireworks and report the people that are, so we can concentrate our efforts,” Horton said by phone on Friday.

The San Bernardino County Fire Department conducted a soft launch of the reporting system last year for a month leading up to the Fourth of July, which is peak fireworks season. During that time, the department received about 2,800 reports.

Now the agency has decided to launch the system earlier and keep it in place year-round.

Horton expects the agency to receive some 8,000 to 10,000 reports through the app this year.

Additionally, the county will hold 10 fireworks surrender events throughout the year, so residents can unload legal and illegal fireworks, with no questions asked.

“You drive up, fire personnel remove the fireworks from your vehicle, and you drive away,” according to a news release [posted to the county fire agency’s Facebook page](#).

A massive explosion set off by fireworks at an Ontario home in mid-March has refocused regional attention on the scourge of illegal fireworks.

It took several days to clear the area after the blast, and bomb technicians filled dozens of large bins with the fireworks before setting them off in controlled burns.

Residents in the area were displaced from their homes, which were declared potentially unsafe in the aftermath.

Cesar Paez-Vasquez, 20, and Alex Paez, 38, are believed to have died in the explosion, according to preliminary identifications by the Ontario Police Department. A [GoFundMe](#) created by Paez's sister links the men as cousins.

"These two young, driven souls had their lives tragically taken due to an explosion in Ontario, CA," Guadalupe Paez wrote in the online fundraiser. "Along with this, their homes are now in ruins leaving their families with a heavy weight on their shoulders not knowing what is next."

An investigation into the cause of the Ontario explosion is ongoing, officials said.

Most illegal fireworks arrive through ports south of the border or from neighboring states, Horton said. And although illegal fireworks are common throughout Southern California, San Bernardino County sits along the Nevada and Arizona borders, where a large influx occurs, Horton said.

Leading up to the Fourth of July, fire officials set up checkpoints along strategic border entry points, "and it's literally like shooting fish in a barrel," Horton said.

Over the last four years, San Bernardino County Fire investigators have confiscated more than 121,600 pounds of illegal fireworks and issued more than 700 citations, according to the news release.

Horton, who has worked at the county fire agency for 17 years, said he thinks the problem is growing worse and may have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"People have been on lockdown for so long, they're trying to blow off steam and have some fun and don't realize the impact they have in Southern California," Horton said. "Beyond wildfires, seen by the example in Ontario, people get killed, and your neighbors are affected."