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Fly flags to show patriotism on Fourth, not fireworks

By Vera Kochan



A lone flag flies on a hillside home in the Bluffs. William and Roberta Klaproth decorate their Moraga yard with American flags for the Fourth of July (far right). Photos Vera Kochan

even those marked "Safe and Sane" are illegal in the county.

Another year of drought brings warnings from local authorities about being fire-wise. Conditions are bad enough without adding Fourth of July fireworks into the mix.

With the scaling-down of sanctioned fireworks displays due to social-distancing, some celebrators are looking for ways to add a "bang" to their festivities by using what has traditionally been touted as "safe and sane" fireworks.

According to FireworksLand.com, "The term 'Safe and Sane' was popularized in the late 1950s and 1960s to refer to a new generation of consumer fireworks. These new fireworks were thought to be safer than the ones sold in previous decades, which did include very large firecrackers and a wide variety of other devices such as rockets and aerial shells." The newly classified fireworks are not supposed to fly or explode and are sold by legal vendors, however the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District reminds residents that all fireworks,

"The only safe and sane approach to fireworks in Contra Costa County is to simply not use them," noted ConFire Chief Lewis T. Broschard III in a June 10 statement. "They are uncontrollable and dangerous, illegal, and their use - especially in our current drought conditions - is irresponsible posing the very real possibility of causing wildland fires that could easily destroy homes and threaten lives in this time of critically high fire risk.

To that end, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors adopted a new fireworks ordinance (Chapter 44-2 of the County Ordinance Code) on June 8 strengthening regulations regarding the possession, manufacture, sale, use, and discharge of fireworks in the unincorporated areas of the county.

The new ordinance declares that property and vessel owners are responsible for ensuring that the use of illegal fireworks does not occur on their property. The ordinance also authorizes the Sheriff's Office to issue citations for violations. Violators are subject to an initial fine of \$100. A second violation within one year is \$200, followed by a \$500 fine for each additional violation of the ordinance within that year.

Reports of fireworks-related fires in Contra Costa County have begun as early as May, when ConFire announced that investigators identified two juveniles who were believed responsible for throwing a tennis ball-sized exploding mortar from a vehicle that burned a quarter acre of vegetation near 321 Golf Club Road in Pleasant Hill in the vicinity of parked cars, homes and Diablo Valley College. If not for observant witnesses, who notified authorities, the fire could easily have spread.

Another incident last month involved three teens who caused a two-alarm fire in Martinez by hitting a flaming tennis ball into a neighbor's yard resulting in a grass fire which burned a house, several vehicles and created a massive fireball causing high-transmission electrical lines to fail, disrupting service to nearly 8,700 customers. What residents mistook for fireworks was actually loud explosions that were caused by detonated propane tanks. However, that assumption makes it clear that communities are on edge as the Fourth of July approaches.

Honoring the founding of the United States of America need not involve fireworks. Holidays such as Valentine's Day, Easter, Hanukah and Christmas, to name a few, all manage to be celebrated without blowing something up. There is no shortage of red, white and blue bunting during this time of year; and expressions of patriotism should not put properties in danger.

To report any fireworks sales or criminal activity call the Arson Tip Line at 1-866-50-ARSON. Tips can be anonymous and are all treated confidentially.

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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