

# Patrols will track down illegal fireworks

By Noreen Flack  
staff writer

Farmington Hills fire investigators are inspecting store displays in an effort to prevent injuries and damage that may occur with illegal use of fireworks over the Fourth of July.

Local stores, however, are not the only fireworks sellers who the police and fire departments are concerned with.

"People will buy fireworks outside the state and bring them in," Farmington Hills Deputy Chief Peter Baldwin said. "Fortunately, it is not hard for the police and fire departments to spot the fireworks in use. We will be issuing a summons for illegal use."

Under state guidelines, the only fireworks that can be sold at the retail level and used by the public are toy paper caps, toy snakes, toy smoke devices, toy trick noisemakers, wire sparklers (size no. 14 or less), fitter sparklers, and both cone and cylinder fountains.

Conviction for illegal use may result in 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine. Last year, a Farmington Hills task force of police officers and firefighters logged 144 fireworks incidents that resulted in misdemeanor tickets to 11 adults who used or possessed illegal fireworks over the Independence Day weekend.

Both the police and fire departments increased on-duty patrols during the evenings. They not only responded to fireworks incidents but also looked for violations involving use, sales or storage. They discouraged the use of legal fireworks and advised on how to exercise caution for people bent on using them.

When they couldn't determine who was violating the law, the police confiscated illegal fireworks. Confiscations — bottle rockets, firecrackers, flaming fireballs — totaled 26.

When remnants of illegal fireworks were found, officers issued

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— Peter Baldwin  
Hills deputy chief

warnings against continued use. In Farmington, the Department of Public Safety logged 10 fireworks complaints.

"WE CONFISCATED some fireworks which were extremely dangerous last year," Baldwin said. "Tubes with impressive charges used to fire into the air are very dangerous."

"The problem with many fireworks like that is people cannot determine the direction they will go and they can land in bushes and grass and catch on fire," Baldwin said.

A particularly dangerous incident occurred on July 7, 1985, when a bottle rocket launched from Branchester penetrated a screen and window at a house on nearby Arden Park, igniting a fire that gutted a second-story bedroom, causing \$30,000 in damage.

"Legal fireworks can also be dangerous," Baldwin said. "People need to supervise the use of these things and make sure they are used properly."

The possibility of injury "is greater when you're talking about the illegal type — the type that moves or explodes," he said.

Burns are the typical injury. But an M-80, for example, could cause blindness, hearing loss or loss of a finger. Injuries to the face and hands are most common.

Both Farmington and Farmington Hills follow fireworks guidelines set down by the Michigan State Police Fire Marshal's Division.

"WE THINK there will be less of a problem this year because of timing," Baldwin said. "Last year, Fourth of July fell on a Monday and we were out Friday, Saturday, and Sunday confiscating fireworks."

"Last year was so dry," Farmington Hills Fire Marshal Stephen Hume said. "The danger is less this year, but the potential is still there."

Farmington Department of Public Safety Fire Marshal Joe Schornack echoed Hume.

"We're not expecting too much trouble this year," Schornack said. "Because of the dry weather last year, we needed to keep a closer look. People just need to watch where they are using their fireworks."

Drought conditions last year made June a month of grass and brush fires. They also made use of fireworks of any kind a significant danger.

Property damage from fireworks can involve structures, not just grassy or wooded areas. The threat to a house is primarily because of the vegetation around it that could burn.

FIRE REPORTS show that the majority of fireworks injuries occur to people younger than 20. Victims of fireworks often suffer second- or third-degree burns, blindness, loss of hearing, loss of fingers, and other permanent injuries.

"It is much safer to watch someone else set them off at a local show instead of trying to display your own fireworks," Baldwin said.

An average of 10,000 fireworks injuries occur in the United States each year. More than 51,000 fires and 15 deaths were caused by fireworks accidents in 1985. In 1987, two firefighters were killed as a result of fires started by fireworks.

## Projectile fireworks are illegal

Fireworks that send a projectile into the air, spin, twirl or emit an audible signal are illegal for general sales or use under state law unless local permits are obtained. The lone exception is toy paper trick noisemakers.

Neither Farmington nor Farmington Hills issues permits to individuals to set off fireworks. In Farmington Hills, public fireworks displays are only permitted if they meet state fire marshal standards.

Fireworks dealers must receive a permit in Farmington Hills but not in Farmington. In each case, fire inspectors will check the dealer's fireworks stock to make sure what's being sold is legal.

Farmington Hills' permit process allows the fire department to know what's stored and sold in the community since fireworks are a transient and seasonal business.

"Basically, we want to make sure what's being sold is legal," said Deputy Fire Chief Peter Baldwin.

"We also want to make sure what's being sold is within eyesight of a reasonable employee, not susceptible to lighting and not stored in large quantities."

Investigators don't make undercover buys.

THE SMALL number of potential fireworks dealers negates the need to require permits in Farmington. The city knows who's selling what through inspectors.

Violators of the state fireworks law face a maximum misdemeanor penalty of 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine. Their fireworks also will be confiscated. There is no age limit on buying legal fireworks.

Call your local fire department if you come across illegal possession or use of fireworks, fire officials urge.

For residents who obtain fireworks legally, the Michigan State Police Fire Marshal's Division suggests following these safety precautions:

- Store fireworks in a dry, cool place.
- Avoid rough handling of fireworks to avoid damage to their fuses.
- Use fireworks outdoors only.
- Keep fireworks away from houses, dry brush and other potentially ignitable things.
- Keep a bucket of water handy to put out small fires if they occur or to extinguish any malfunctioning fireworks.
- Light only one device at a time.



Farmington Hills firefighter Denny Hughes with firecrackers, Roman candles and various sizes of bottle rockets.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

## Opposed Groups battle Haggerty plans

By James Radebaugh  
staff writer

Concerned Citizens for West Bloomfield and an area environmental group oppose plans for a new Haggerty Road connector between I-96 and Pontiac Trail.

Concerned Citizens sent a letter last week to the Michigan Department of Transportation's planning division stating that the project, which is intended to reduce traffic congestion on Haggerty and other north-south roads in the area, will damage the environment and promote urban sprawl without correcting safety hazards on Haggerty. Also opposed is the East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

The state is continuing to solicit community input on various options that involve either widening Haggerty, making it the connector, or building a new road to the west.

Doing either would only solve the traffic problem temporarily, according to the letter, signed by Concerned Citizens' co-presidents Lorna McEwen and Larry Wasserman. By providing easier access to rural areas, the connector would encourage development and eventually result in more traffic, they said.

"IT IS time southeast Michigan began to address the problem of urban sprawl, which both wastes productive farmland and causes our current urban centers to deteriorate," the letter said.

Doing nothing, however, is not an option, state transportation officials claim.

The transportation department

***'Our concern is that the proposals that are being discussed will lead to an extension north of Pontiac Trail' to connect with M-59.***

— Elizabeth Harris  
EMEAC director

released a report this month that cited severe congestion on Haggerty, a two-lane road, caused by commuters from the north traveling to and from the intersection of I-96, I-496 and I-275 in southern Oakland County.

"Without improvements, complete breakdown of the system is expected," the report said.

More than 800 people attended a public hearing three weeks ago at Novi High School to learn from state officials about the various options for linking the highways with Pontiac Trail and to express their preferences.

A proposal to build a new, multi-lane road a quarter mile west of Haggerty in Commerce Township, making a detour at 14 Mile Road to avoid a peak bog, has received overwhelming public support, according to Philip Chisholm, a public hearing officer for the department.

THAT OPTION, known as 4A, is supported by the West Bloomfield

township board and the Farmington Hills City Council.

The other options are to straighten Haggerty and widen it to six lanes or variations on either plan.

While Concerned Citizens opposes all options for the connector on environmental grounds, the group also feels the issue diverts attention and resources from correcting safety hazards on Haggerty.

Wasserman said Monday the group wants Haggerty to be widened to include a left turn lane to make it safer.

"We're not going to back anything until they address the real issue, and that's Haggerty," Wasserman said.

The East Michigan Environmental Action Council, headquartered in Bloomfield Township, also wrote to the transportation department to oppose the connector.

"Our concern is that the proposals that are being discussed will lead to an extension north of Pontiac Trail," to connect with M-59, said Elizabeth Harris, director of EMEAC.

Such a link, which has been proposed in the past, is not needed and would promote urban sprawl, Harris said. It would also promote automobile use, which contributes to global warming, acid rain and other environmental hazards, she said.

Transportation department officials are expected to choose a plan for the connector this fall or early winter, according to department officials.

Wasserman said Concerned Citizens will begin a letter writing campaign directed at state officials to make their opposition to the project known.

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