

Outraged Public Speak Out on Fireworks Tragedy

July 17, 2024



Tuesday's Del Norte Board of Supervisors was a somber and highly emotional event.

During the Public Comments period, supervisors listened to a dozen individuals from a packed audience who expressed their outrage over the July 4th explosion of illegal fireworks on South Beach. A three year old toddler, William Lupan, clings to life in Portland after sustaining major body trauma injuries from the South Beach explosion. 14 others sustained assorted injuries.

The outrage and frustration were palpable.

Speakers reported all the known negatives of family pets escaping the fireworks chaos heard from neighborhood homes; some escaped pets have yet to be found, and perhaps never will be. The litter created by spent fireworks, the toxins and plastics that pollute our beaches and oceans, the impact on wildlife, the noise and the dangers posed by irresponsible folks who engage in this unlawful activity were profound.

Mario Westphal, Crescent City lamented how the 4th of July used to be a fun event but fireworks has changed that environment and become a monster akin to "Spring break in Daytona Beach." Westphal shared his frustration and disdain caused by the combination use of drugs and alcohol and have produced mayhem. "You can't fix stupid and there will always be bad actors among us. The City and County have failed us in addressing this problem." He urged the supervisors to ban fireworks in Del Norte County.

Rose Reppond of Crescent City was a direct victim of the Tragedy. Rose wore a head scarf obscuring her wounds and injuries to her head and back and displayed her damaged and bandaged fingers suffered on

South Beach, as result of the explosion. She awaits her imminent medical appointment to determine the future use of her fingers and the effects of shrapnel striking her skull. Rose called the illegal fireworks a “war zone.”

Another speaker begged supervisors to “do something,” her frustration was as glaring as the mortars she complained about.

Yet another speaker stated “ ... law enforcement has failed us.”

Board Chair Dean Wilson told The standing room audience that supervisors would not individually respond to this morning’s strong public comment. Wilson issued the following statement via Facebook:

“ Many years ago when I was Sheriff, an effort led by CalFire and local fire departments to enforce fireworks laws was done. It lasted one 4th and resulted in citations, confiscations and some charges filed. Such actions are labor intensive to be effective and currently we are understaffed and as noted, those working were very busy handling calls and traffic control. We need to seek solutions that are grounded in reality. Those responsible for this latest crime need to face charges. Active Beach patrol on the 4th by State and local fire officials would help prevent such reckless behavior.”

Sheriff Garrett Scott released the following statement. “ I attended the Board of Supervisors meeting to listen to members of the Public and hear their concerns. I understand the years of built up frustration and have already begun contacting the various law enforcement organizations responsible for enforcement throughout our beaches. The tragedy that took place July 4th is absolutely being investigated.

Thank you, everyone for your phone calls and messages of support.”

Crescent City Chief Richard Griffin has prioritized this incident at the very highest level. The Chief responded by stating Beach Front Park was devoid of fire-works activity which he attributes to fireworks mitigation efforts. The City has made arrests for those individuals engaging in illegal fireworks activity. “...in the coming days, Our LEADN group (Law Enforcement Administration of Del Norte) will be meeting to address illegal fireworks. “ I’m a parent and my family lives in this community. I’ve placed this issue at the very highest level,” stated Chief Griffin.

The City Council plans to discuss new ordinances to address illegal fireworks in the next several Meetings.