



Photo by Peter Spencer on Pexels

# Uncontrolled Burn

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DIMMING THE SPARK OF  
ILLEGAL FIREWORKS IN SAN  
FRANCISCO



Approximately **100,000 San Francisco households**, or **one in four**, have a **pet** frightened by fireworks.



## ILLEGAL FIREWORKS IMPACT TO SAN FRANCISCO

Photo by Matthew Foulds on Unsplash



Over 3,500 San Francisco children under the age of 5 are likely frightened or bothered by fireworks.



ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO

Photo by Meruyert Gonullu on Pexels





Photo by Mikhail Nilov on Pexels

An estimated **10,000 San Francisco residents with some form of autism** may be affected by fireworks.

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO



Photo by Mario Wallner on Pexels

An estimated **12,500** San Francisco residents have **some level of dementia** and can be agitated by fireworks.



ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO



Photo by RDNE Stock Project on Pexels

In any given year, an estimated 2,500 San Francisco combat veterans and 37,700 San Francisco adults suffering from PTSD may be triggered by the explosions from fireworks.

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO



Photo by Harrison Haines on Pexels

Residents living close to areas where fireworks are regularly set off worry about their housing or nearby flora catching fire or having an errant firework smash through a window.

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## ILLEGAL FIREWORKS IMPACT TO SAN FRANCISCO



Photo by Anna Shvets on Pexels

Many San Franciscans are seriously injured each year by illegal fireworks suffering **serious and permanent injuries & burns, loss of sight, hearing, fingers, toes, and tragically loss of life** as experienced last New Years Eve on Treasure island.

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO





Photo by Eclipse Chasers on Pexels

San Francisco's wildlife, such as coyotes, racoons, birds, squirrels, frogs and fish, can suffer serious consequences from the deployment of fireworks. Birds can become so frightened that they fly off en masse into the night sky in such a panic that they fly into objects or out to sea so far that they cannot return safely.

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO



Photo by Etienne Girardet on Unsplash

Fireworks contaminate the air, water and soil with toxic chemicals and microplastics, with devastating effects upon exposed people and animals. This defiling of the air, water and soil has both short and long term impacts on the environment.

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO

- **Fire Department:** Extinguishes fires; Provides emergency aid and transport for injuries; Investigates causes of fires; Messages and educates the public
- **Police Department:** Stops ongoing illegal activity such as sales of illegal fireworks, possession of illegal fireworks, and deployment of illegal fireworks; Works with state and federal agencies on interdiction; Messages and educates the public
  - Bomb Squad: Handles disposal
  - Arson Task Force: Investigates fires
- **Department of Emergency Management:** Handles incoming calls and dispatches help; Messages and educates the public
- **City Administrator/311:** Handles 311 calls and transfers issues to appropriate agency
- **Department of Public Works:** Handles clean-up
- **Department of Public Health:** Provides care for the injured and traumatized
- **Recreation and Park Department:** Protects city parks from illegal activity
- **Department of Animal Care and Control:** Cares for lost pets and injured wildlife
- **Environment Department:** Handles pollution issues
- **District Attorney:** Handles prosecutions

Illegal fireworks have an impact on a wide variety of SF City Departments

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ILLEGAL FIREWORKS  
IMPACT TO SAN  
FRANCISCO



## SEC. 1290. Discharge Of Fireworks Prohibited.

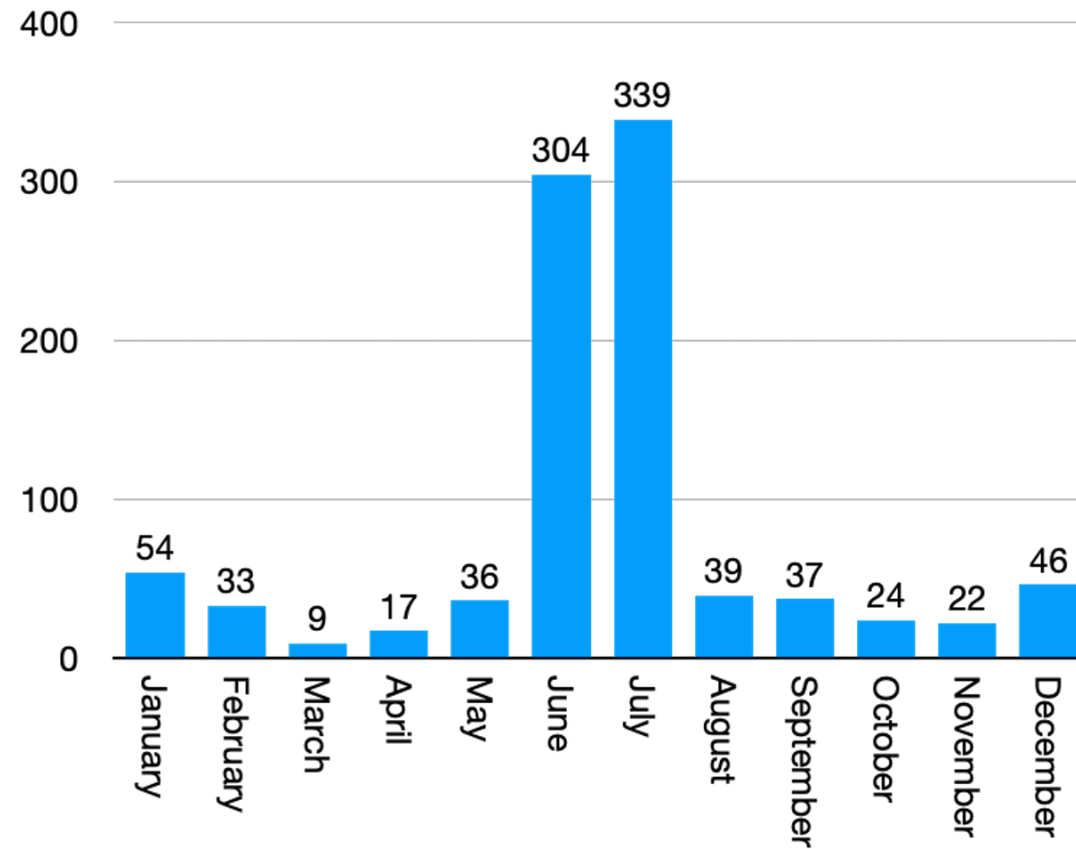
No person or persons, firm, company, corporation or association shall fire or discharge any fireworks of any kind or description within the limits of the City and County of San Francisco.

Provided, however, that public displays of fireworks may be given with the joint written consent of the Fire Marshal and the Chief of Police.

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## THE LAW ON ILLEGAL FIREWORKS IN SAN FRANCISCO

# Dispatched Fireworks Calls By Month 2018-2023







## Civil Grand Jury Findings

1. Lack of interdepartmental coordination and lack of comprehensive and aggressive strategies for addressing the issue.
2. Conflicting public messaging on how to report illegal fireworks.
3. Inadequate public education and engagement.
4. Failure to stop deployments at known hot spots.
5. Failure to gather and monitor metrics.

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# Civil Grand Jury Recommendations

- Create a working group headed by the Department of Emergency Management to address the deficiencies found which were a lack of coordination, inconsistent public messaging, inadequate public education and engagement, a lack of strategies for better enforcement and a lack of metrics to track the problem.
- Task the Performance Team in the Controller's Office to create easy to understand graphics that capture the newly tracked metrics and sets target goals so the public can see how the City is doing on this issue.



## Mayor's Response Letter

- Pleased to read in the mayor's response letter the acknowledgment that illegal fireworks "*pose serious public safety challenges*".
  - Unfortunately there is no recognition of the report's documentation of the suffering of residents and wildlife or of the pollution.
- Happy to hear that this July 4th "*the named departments did coordinate to improve their messaging and response plan, with significant success*" and appreciation of the Jury's role in that improvement.
  - Was there "significant success"? How was this determined?  
Unfortunately, without metrics, we just don't really know the answer.
  - We stand by our findings which are based upon documented facts from our research and the interviews conducted with personnel in many of the impacted departments.



## Mayor's Responses to Findings and Recommendations

- Disappointed in the responses to the jury's findings and recommendations which disagreed partially with more than half of the findings and did not implement the working group, stating - "*The working group is duplicative to other efforts; the City believes that the existing efforts are sufficient for both communications and operational planning*". What data exists to back up this statement?
- Many of the responses appear to exemplify the unwillingness to take the problem seriously but rather to continue to "do the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". I believe someone once stated that this behavior is the definition of insanity.



## Actions Taken By Other Cities and Counties

- Working Groups or Task Forces accountable to the public
- Social ordinances and civil penalties/fines
- Apps and websites for the public to report activity & track responses
- Public reporting of metrics showing the current status
- Targeted media campaigns addressing all of the dangers and harms
- Law Enforcement and Prevention:
  - Messaging to the public ahead of 4th of July that illegal fireworks will not be tolerated and violators may be fined or arrested
  - Keeping crowds out of the streets & enforcing fireworks laws
  - Implementing buy & bust programs to stop large dealers





# Conclusion

- This is an issue that impacts many San Franciscans
- There are many things we can do to improve but we first need to acknowledge that our current approach isn't working and then we can attempt to make change by:
  - Better coordination and planning
  - Better public messaging on reporting
  - Better metrics being identified, collected and monitored
  - Better education and engagement to change behavior
  - Better crime prevention and law enforcement



Photo by Bart Fisher

I dedicate this presentation to my recently deceased dog Angel and all the other pets, residents, wildlife and our environment which are all impacted every year by illegal fireworks. Thank you for listening!



DEDICATION AND  
THANKS