

# Vancouver looks to ban backyard fireworks displays

## Officials would like to see them restricted to designated public areas

BY DARAH HANSEN, VANCOUVER SUN MARCH 2, 2013

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High school student Adam Felardeau speaks at a news conference about being injured by fireworks.

**Photograph by:** Arlen Redekop, PNG Files, Vancouver Sun

Citing public safety and nuisance concerns, Vancouver is looking to take much of the bang out of Halloween by banning the use of consumer fireworks anywhere in the city except in designated public areas.

The move would put an end to the popular backyard fireworks parties held to mark the Oct. 31 event.

Instead, fire officials say the city and its residents would be better served if fireworks were restricted to

designated public property, such as community parks or centres. That way, their use - and misuse - could be better monitored.

"It is a complete shift in what we are presently doing," said Vancouver Fire Chief John McKearney following a presentation to council Tuesday.

McKearney said fireworks-related mishaps put considerable stress on local police, firefighters and hospitals, and even schools and animal-care services, such as the SPCA.

He estimated fires set either by accident or on purpose have resulted in more than \$2 million damage in the past seven years. In 2007 alone, a roman candle fired into a transit bus caused \$1.3 million in damage.

Police respond to an average of 309 calls for service at Halloween, while emergency rooms see a surge in patients, typically between 20 and 29 years old, suffering burns and amputations.

Other complaints related to the widespread use of fireworks relate to excessive noise, the safety of pets and wild animals, and air-quality.

Vancouver police Deputy Chief Const. Doug LePard said many people in the city use fireworks responsibly, but added too much of the supply ends up going to kids who are "blowing off their fingers and tying them to pets."

The fire chief's recommendations won unanimous support from city councillors, many of whom shared personal stories of fireworks celebrations-gone-wrong.

"I have a friend whose son shot off a firework and it burned down his house, so I understand the risks," said Coun. Adriane Carr.

McKearney said his staff will now work to refine the proposal before bringing it back to council.

Should it be approved, the new rules would permit fireworks to be used on five evenings per year: New Year's Eve, Halloween, Lunar New Year, Diwali and Vaisakhi.

Vancouver is one of only a handful of municipalities in Canada where the use of consumer fireworks is still allowed.

Many other cities, including North Vancouver, Coquitlam, Maple Ridge, Richmond, Delta, Surrey, Langley, Mission, Abbotsford, Victoria and Calgary, have all banned their use.

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