

Reframing the 4th of July

Spokane's Fireworks Ban Presented by Lisa Jones

I. Program/Project Overview:

The City of Spokane, like many areas throughout the country, had a high incidence of fires and injuries related to or caused by consumer use of common fireworks. Spokane Fire Department's raw data on the number of fireworks-caused fires within the City of Spokane indicated a 10-year (1983-1992) pre-ban average of 104 fires per year occurring between June 28 through July 6. Fireworks-caused injuries averaged 29 annually with patients treated at six regional hospitals. Volume / capacity indicators from 911 Dispatch demonstrated the need to "stack" incoming 911 calls during peak hours of fireworks activity, which essentially meant that emergency calls for service were being put on hold as complaints about fireworks use overwhelmed the 911 emergency call center.

The City of Spokane and surrounding areas partnered to detail and communicate to the public damaging losses in terms of fireworks-related fires and injuries, to legislate a ban on the *sale* and *use* of common fireworks, and to enforce the ban in unison. Collaborative efforts resulted in a fireworks ban and better communications and relations between partner groups; as a result fireworks-related fires, injuries and nuisance calls affecting the overall quality of life for Spokane's residents, visitors and pets have been *substantially* reduced.

II. Formative Evaluation - Planning

- Our goals were two-fold:
 1. Enhance quality of life for all (residents, visitors, and animals) during the 4th of July holiday:
 - Reduce Risk (fear and actual loss/damage/injury)
 - Reduce fireworks-related noise
 - Reduce debris in air and on the ground
 2. Change patterned behavior about fireworks use.
- Our objectives were many:
 - Significantly *reduce* if not eliminate Fireworks-caused injuries.
 - Significantly *reduce* if not eliminate Fireworks-caused fires.
 - Eliminate the need to stack fire/emergency 9-1-1 calls.
 - Reframe: Suggest Alternatives
 - Coordinate: Regional, United Effort
 - Educate: Tell/Show the Truth About Fireworks
 - Legislate: Introduce and Pass Fireworks Ban
 - Support Change: Enforce Ban; Report Results!

Information useful in identifying the problem was the number of fireworks related fires and injuries and the number of 911 reports/calls that occurred around the 4th of July holiday. Time parameters used were June 28 through July 6 over a 10 year time frame. The local climate, topography, vegetation, wildland fire risk and fire incident pattern was also evaluated. Multiple residential and field/wildland fires have occurred and estimating even a minimum cost of \$500 per call, significant savings for the fire department were anticipated.

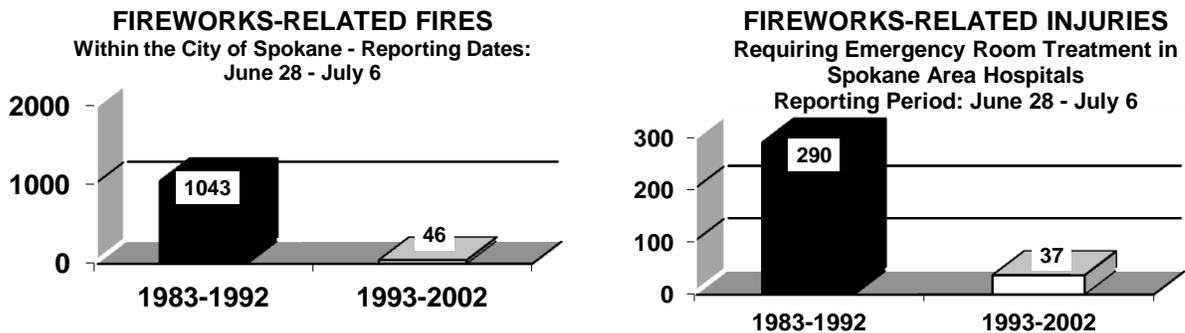
III. Process Evaluation - Implementation

We identified the target audience – people who engaged in the purchase, sale and use of common fireworks, legislators (City Council, Mayor) and the media. We evaluated the target geographical areas by mapping the past ten years' fires and fireworks incidents. We gathered area hospitals statistics on fireworks related injuries over the same ten year time frame. We also looked at how best to reach the target audience based on past successes. Based on fire incidents and fireworks related reports, June 28 through July 6 was determined to be the “window” of concentrated fireworks use. Also, national data suggested a predictable number of July 4th fireworks-caused fires and injuries. Many of these fires and the injuries were preventable if consumer fireworks were removed from local markets and residents were educated on the *actual community cost* of “safe-and-sane” fireworks.

These analyses compelled us to institute a ban on consumer use of common fireworks, to reduce the incidence of fireworks related fires and injuries and to reduce the instance of “stacking” 911 calls to free up emergency dispatch centers for actual emergency calls. To complete the goals and objectives, we needed to coordinate local efforts and resources among city and county representatives and others concerned, educate politicians and decision-makers, pass the fireworks ban, educate the public on hazards associated with use of common fireworks, and encourage as an alternative the attendance of outdoor public fireworks displays put on by the professionals. Enforcement teams also had to be organized and procedures established for handling fireworks infractions, which took an initial investment. We would measure results by assessing fireworks related fires and injuries after implementing the ban. We would also measure call statistics to see if there was a noticeable reduction in 911 calls for fireworks use.

IV. **Impact Evaluation – Short Term Results:** All Goals and Objectives outlined in section II were achieved.

V. **Outcome Evaluation – Long Term Results:**



Recommendations for others: It was *critical* to gain support from community and department leadership and to coordinate with other agencies/jurisdictions to make full use of combined resources. Statistical analysis presented above tells the story. Good visual representations and compelling facts give meaning and emphasis to the real “hidden” costs of fireworks use. Know and communicate the FACTS. Work/partner with others. Make a *difference*.

Conclusions: There are still individuals in the community who believe it is their patriotic right to light fireworks, build sparkler bombs, and create disturbances throughout their neighborhood as evidenced by calls received by Crime Check. In 2011, Crime Check processed 578 fireworks calls with 335 of those from the City of Spokane. However, there are *far fewer* fires, injuries and nuisance calls. Our 911 system no longer has to “stack” medical calls because fire and other personnel enforcement efforts of the fireworks ban has dramatically reduced the incidents. Long term partnership is keeping Spokane SAFE.