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Tight firework restrictions recommended for Pacifica beaches

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PACIFICA -- In response to environmental concerns, Fourth of July fireworks could be all but banned on Pacifica's beaches under recommendations scheduled to be presented for the first time Monday.

A proposal from the city's fireworks task force urges the City Council to prohibit them at one beach and severely restrict the "safe and sane" devices at another. The recommendations are intended to keep firework debris out of the sand at the only two city beaches on the Pacific Ocean where fireworks are allowed.

In an attempt to balance the restrictions, the task force has also proposed allowing fireworks in a limited strip of beach and two parking lots. The task force believes it would help keep drawing the crowds who spent over \$424,000 last year at the town's fireworks stands and that community groups depend on for funding.

It's unclear when the council would vote on whether to make the recommendations law. With less than a month until Independence Day, fireworks will likely be on the beaches this year. This latest regulation effort is aimed at the beloved -- and despised -- summer tradition that was legal in just 14 cities in the greater Bay Area in 2012.

The whiff of new restrictions drew passionate but opposing reactions from beach lovers on a recent day at Linda Mar Beach, which is ground zero for the fireworks debate. The task force proposal calls for allowing fireworks in the south parking lot there and in a several hundred foot strip on the roughly mile-long crescent of sand.

Under the recommendations, fireworks would be banned completely on Rockaway Beach, though still allowed in its south parking lot.

"It's just going to turn into something else," Steven Turdici, 25, of Pacifica said. "People are going to pack up and go."

He's worried a change could ruin the tradition at Linda Mar, where crowds of at least 600 people ignite fireworks on July 4. It may also drive away people who come to town and spend money at the safe and sane stands, he said.

But just down the beach from Turdici, Pacifica resident Christina Climer exclaimed, "I would love it," after hearing about the proposal.

The noise from fireworks -- legal and illegal -- have driven the 39-year-old local's dog to run away twice. She also said the beach is always trashed after Independence Day. And the firework remnants keep washing up on the shore weeks and sometimes months later.

"It's horrible," she said. "Everyone is fed up with it."

Fireworks have already been the subject of two citywide votes -- most recently in 1996 -- and both times residents overwhelmingly decided to keep them. The stands that sell safe and sane fireworks, which collectively netted over \$100,000 in 2012, are big fundraisers for groups like Terra Nova High School and the Pacifica Girls Softball League.

But a move for new rules emerged in 2012 when complaints to the City Council over the trash spurred the creation of the task force, which includes Bill Gray, a veteran of previous fireworks skirmishes. The Terra Nova High School athletic director and head football coach says he thinks

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skirmishes. The Terra Nova High School athletic director and head football coach says he thinks the proposal is a "pretty healthy" compromise. Yet he's worried about the future of fireworks in the city.

He said he is concerned the recommendations, if implemented, could reduce the income to the community groups who rely on the sales to fund their activities. He also believes new restrictions would bring new expenses, such as more police to enforce possible additional rules.

"We're hoping that it won't hurt our bottom line and return a cleaner beach," he said. "But there is extra cost to enforcing extra rules."

Though the city and community groups that run the stands help pick up the mess left on July 5, they don't find everything. Lynn Adams, president of the Pacifica Beach Coalition, said almost no month goes by without someone finding firework debris on the beach. It's a tradition she would like to see end.

The task force proposal also includes recommendations that would require groups that sell fireworks to complete 160 hours of beach cleanup. Additionally, it recommends more community education on littering and extra garbage cans at the beach.

"We have a moral obligation to protect the fish, the sea birds and the animals," Adams said. "It's not OK. It gets washed into the water."

Mayor Len Stone would not say whether he will back the recommendations but said the firework trash on the beach is the reason the council took on the issue in the first place.

The City Council meets at 7 p.m. Monday at 2212 Beach Blvd. in Pacifica.

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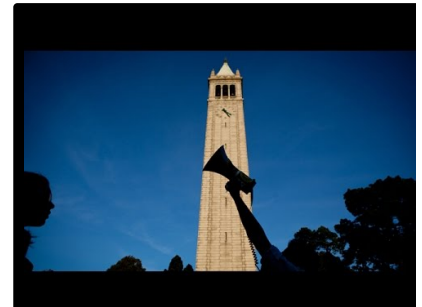
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