FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY FIRE AND LAW OFFICIALS CAUTION CITIZENS ON EXTREME FIRE DANGER RELATED TO ILLEGAL FIREWORKS USE; NEW ORDINANCE TO STRENGTHEN ENFORCEMENT

New County Ordinance to Hold Hosts of Illegal Fireworks Accountable for Damages Caused

CONCORD, CALIF., June 10, 2021 – Contra Costa County Fire Protection District (Con Fire) and law enforcement agencies across the county today warned citizens about the extreme dangers of illegal fireworks use in current critically high fire danger conditions and reminded of the county ordinance enacted earlier this week that strengthens enforcement abilities.

Fire and law enforcement leaders reminded residents and visitors that all fireworks, regardless of type or labeling, are illegal everywhere in the county. There are no “Safe & Sane” fireworks, they are all dangerous and uncontrollable. Additionally, the potential for grievous bodily harm posed by these illegal devices and the risk of causing catastrophic wildfires during this time of extremely high fire danger is great.

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors on June 8 adopted a new fireworks ordinance (Chapter 44-2 of the County Ordinance Code) strengthening regulations regarding the possession, manufacture, sale, use, and discharge of fireworks in the unincorporated areas of the county. Under the new ordinance, property and vessel owners are responsible for ensuring use of fireworks does not occur on their property and may be liable for ordinance violations if fireworks use does occur. The fireworks ordinance also authorizes the Sheriff’s Office to issue citations for violations. A violation of the ordinance is subject to an initial fine of $100, $200 for a second violation within one year, and a fine of $500 for each additional violation of the ordinance within one year.

With drought conditions and prolonged warm, dry and windy weather, fire danger is unusually high making fireworks an even greater threat to our communities than in wetter and cooler years. Already, in May, a major fire in Antioch started by a single firework caused the destruction of eight apartments and the displacement of some 40 residents. Other lesser fires throughout the area have also been caused by, or are suspected of being caused by, fireworks.

“The only safe and sane approach to fireworks in Contra Costa County is to simply not use them,” said Fire Chief Lewis T. Broschard III, Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. “They are uncontrollable and dangerous, illegal, and their use – especially in our current drought conditions – is irresponsible posing the very real possibility of causing wildland fires that could easily destroy homes and threaten lives in this time of critically high fire risk.”

“Fire season is already underway in Contra Costa. We need to remain diligent in preventing the use of illegal fireworks,” said Diana Becton, Contra Costa District Attorney. “My office will work with our law enforcement partners to deter the use of illegal fireworks and prosecute those who endanger the community.”
“All of Contra Costa County is a fireworks-free zone and the sale, use or possession of fireworks is banned,” said Contra Costa Sheriff David Livingston. “Fireworks also pose a significant risk of starting a fire or injuring someone. Please have an enjoyable 4th of July holiday weekend, but please be safe and follow the law.”

Because of drought conditions, communities across the district have experienced a 35% increase in grass and vegetation fires this year. Since the start of annual fire weather May 1, 293 vegetation and exterior fires have burned across the district. Last year, Con Fire responded to nearly 100 such fires during the entire Independence Day weekend, July 3 – 5, alone. More than a dozen of these fires are known to have been caused by fireworks while many more were suspected.

“As we approach the 4th of July holiday, we want to remind our residents fireworks are not only illegal but are also dangerous. Use of fireworks can cause injury and significant damage to property,” said Chief Mark Bustillos, Concord Police Department. “We want everyone to have a great time celebrating with family and friends, but illegal fireworks continue to be a problem in our community. We wish everyone a happy and safe 4th of July.”

“Already several weeks into what promises to be a high-risk fire season, we want to remind residents of the very real dangers involved with illegal fireworks,” said Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt. “We owe it to our friends, families, and neighbors to be safe and avoid fireworks risks this Fourth of July holiday - - the City of Lafayette wants everyone to be safe and avoid fireworks-related accidents and fires.”

“We wish you all the best on this holiday and while Independence Day is a time for celebrating, it is not a time to use fireworks,” said Chief Manjit Sappal, Martinez Police Department. “We wish to make it clear that fireworks are illegal and unsafe; they can cause injury and devastating fire-related damage. Please commit to the safety of your family, friends, and neighbors by not using any fireworks.”

“Celebrating the Fourth of July is a long-standing tradition across our Nation, but we can do it without the illegal fireworks. This year in particular, the risk of fire is at an all-time high,” said Chief Brian Addington, Pittsburg Police Department. “Our message is clear – fireworks are illegal and we will have a team of officers working to catch those who choose to break the law.”

“Illegal fireworks pose serious danger to those using them, as well as the surrounding community. Sadly, last year a Pleasant Hill resident experienced a life-changing and debilitating injury while using illegal fireworks,” said Chief Bryan Hill, Pleasant Hill Police Department. “This year, as always, we are encouraging everyone to celebrate our independence in a safe and legal manner.”

While public fireworks events around the county are fewer than in years gone by due to the pandemic and drought conditions, officials strongly discourage residents from attempting to replace these events with illegal consumer fireworks use. Instead, residents are encouraged to watch a fireworks display on television or online video, use safe and readily available glow-stick products, or many other ways of celebrating. Con Fire will publish a list of all Fire Marshal-approved Contra Costa County displays in early July.

Fire and law officials urge residents to protect their homes, families, and neighborhoods by reporting all use of illegal fireworks immediately to their local law enforcement agency’s non-emergency phone line. In cases of fires or where immediate risk to life or property exists, 911 should be called.
In addition to fire danger, there are significant risks of serious injury or death. On July 5th, 2018, an Antioch resident was severely injured handling a supposedly “Safe & Sane” firework discarded at his place of business. Nationwide, thousands are injured annually, more than half are under 15.

For more on protecting homes and businesses from wildfires, visit www.cccfpd.org/wildfireprep.

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About Contra Costa County Fire Protection District (Con Fire) -- A recognized fire service leader - - Con Fire provides fire and emergency medical services to more than a million people across its 304 square-mile District area, and through mutual aid, in and around the 20 cities and unincorporated communities of Contra Costa County, California. With few exceptions, county emergency ambulance transport services are provided by Con Fire through its unique sub-contractor Alliance model across the District and beyond to include some 520 square miles of the county. In 2020, the District responded to some 75,000 fire and EMS emergencies and dispatched some 95,000 ambulances, providing expert medical care on more than 74,000 ambulance transports. The District, with 26 fire stations and more than 400 employees, is dedicated to preserving life, property, and the environment.

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