



# *City of Stevenson*

## **Fire Department – Rob Farris, Chief**

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To: Stevenson City Council  
From: Rob Farris, Fire Chief  
RE: Fireworks  
Date: February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### **Summary**

In 2022 we took a more aggressive approach with our public education program for safe use of fireworks. This included a coordinated social media blast partnership with the local private retail fireworks industry. During the July 4<sup>th</sup> retail fireworks selling period we had one firework related incident that was reported the morning of July 5<sup>th</sup>. The incident was a report of smoldering mulch behind the Port building at the waterfront. I was out driving around town on the 4<sup>th</sup>, and it seemed like people were calmer about letting fireworks off. The Fire Department also provided fire standby for the celebration display at the fairgrounds. Our volunteers made drive-throughs of town going to and from the event so that added visibility may have helped.

### **Public Education**

Moving forward I'd like to continue to grow the public education program for safe usage of fireworks. I think we can expand our social media reach by involving the other fire districts social media pages. I'd also like to make banners that we can place on the signs at each end of town. I was made aware that this was attempted last year but was denied for some reason. I'll be working with Leana on submitting any required permitting to lock in these sign resources for the fire department during the 4<sup>th</sup> of July retail selling period.

### **Ordinance**

In the past I have advocated to add the ability for the Fire Chief to be able to place an emergency use ban on fireworks when fire weather conditions warranted. The current tool that we use to judge fire weather would be a Red Flag Warning that is issued by the National Weather Service out of Portland, Oregon. In Skamania County we have two main fire weather zones with a third zone on the very east end of the county reaching into the county a few miles. The Fire Weather zone that Stevenson is in is Zone 660.

In doing research for the criteria that would trigger consideration of a fireworks use ban I found that the Red Flag Warning criteria check all the important boxes that the DNR and Forest Service uses. These types of criteria include but are not limited to Relative Humidity, Fire Fuel Conditions, Conditions that favor rapid growth of fire starts. The main concern for our area is low Relative Humidity and the wind.

My proposal is to add a new section to existing ordinances that authorize the Fire Chief to place emergency fire bans in place. The other option would be to add a section to the ordinance that sets the retail sales period for fireworks.

### **Ordinance Sync with Skamania County**

The City of Stevenson and Skamania County would need to sync their ordinances that authorize a fireworks use ban. City of North Bonneville already has an ordinance in place that allows their fire chief to place a ban on the use of fireworks. Skamania County's banning authority falls with the Fire Marshal's office. The Fire Chief already works with the Skamania County Fire Marshal's office on the lifting of the annual burn ban and placing emergency fire bans in place if needed so the communication channels already exist.

### **Trigging a Fireworks Use Ban**

A red flag warning should not automatically trigger a fireworks use ban, it should trigger the coordination and conversation with the Skamania County Fire Marshal's office and the regional DNR Fire Manager. Once it is decided that the Red Flag event is sufficient to place a fireworks use ban in place then coordinated communication with the public should happen.

### **Enforcement**

Enforcement of a use ban will be challenging. The enforcement must be done by the Sheriff's office. Local Fire Volunteers do not have citing authority and it would place our volunteers in very awkward circumstances with their fellow community members. Unfortunately, most enforcement action cannot happen without the deputy actually witnessing the fireworks being lit.