



ARTS & CULTURE

Nightly Fireworks Across the US Cause Public Concern

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Most Americans welcome a fireworks show on July 4th, the nation's Independence Day. Many also enjoy them on New Year's Day and in private celebrations.

As a nightly event, however, the explosions are not so well received.

But that is exactly what Americans in many cities across the country have reported experiencing over the last several weeks. Some people are angry about the fireworks and want them to stop. Some want to know who is responsible and want them to stop. Some people are afraid of what the nightly explosions might mean and want them to stop.

Julie Heckman is wondering, herself. She leads the American Pyrotechnics Association, a fireworks industry trade group.

Her industry had high hopes for 2020. Then came the Covid-19 crisis with its closures and cancellations. That had people who sell fireworks worried that sales would be low.

Those fears, however, have **gone up in smoke**.

"Sales are **off the hook** right now," Heckman said. She added that the industry is concerned about reports of fireworks use in cities where it violates local laws.

New York City is an example. And the city's mayor Bill de Blasio has set up a task force to deal with the illegal activity.

New Yorkers were among the first in the country to report the late night noise. Many are losing sleep. One child was reported injured by an explosion this week.

“This is a real problem. It is not just a quality-of-life problem and a noise problem,” de Blasio said.

The task force will carry out operations to try to stop the sales of the explosives. The group is made up of police, firefighters and the Sheriff’s Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

Other officials express similar concern.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy said there are too many reports of fireworks being set off across the state.

“This is no way to **blow off steam**,” he told reporters recently in Trenton, the capital.

Officials in Oakland, California, said they have received more **complaints** of illegal fireworks and reports of celebratory gunfire than usual this year. At least five fires have been linked to fireworks since late May, officials said.

And in Denver, Colorado, police seized 1,360 kilograms of illegal fireworks during a traffic stop.

There are many different opinions about why fireworks have gotten so popular.

Some social media users are posting messages that blame the government. Some of them suggest the police are setting off fireworks to **intimidate** people protesting police violence around the country.

“My neighbors and I believe that this is part of a **coordinated** attack on Black and Brown communities by government forces,” said writer Robert Jones Jr. in a Twitter post. His recent posts on fireworks have been retweeted thousands of times.

A [video captured in New York](#) appears to show fire department workers setting off the explosives outside their station.

Pyrotechnics expert and company owner Mike Tockstein has a different explanation.

“Fireworks are used across the entire country for a full month leading up to the Fourth of July,” he said. “There is a slight uptick, but I don’t think it’s anything more than people are stuck at home and hey, look, fireworks are available.”

No matter who is responsible, the noisy light shows could last for some time. Many seasonal stores only opened this week. Tockstein predicts people will continue to buy fireworks in the days leading up to July 4th.

I'm Caty Weaver.

Caty Weaver wrote this report for VOA Learning English. Mario Ritter, Jr. was the editor.

Words in This Story

gone up in smoke *-idiom* to be destroyed by, or as if by, burning

off the hook *-idiom* without restraint or reserve

blow off steam *-idiom* to calm down and get rid of energy or anger by doing something active

complaint *-n.* an official report of someone has done something wrong

intimidate *-v.* to make (someone) afraid

coordinated *-adj.* organized well by a group

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