

Implications for Recognizing Religious and Cultural Celebrations for Fireworks Displays

ISSUE

The City of Saskatoon (the City) regulates the use of fireworks in the community through Bylaw No. 7990, *The Fire and Protective Services Bylaw, 2001* (the Bylaw) and in accordance with relevant provisions of Canada's *Explosives Act*. The Bylaw limits the types of events that are eligible for fireworks displays. As such, requests have recently been made to the City to permit religious and cultural celebrations as eligible activities for which consumer fireworks can be discharged within the City.

BACKGROUND

At its [November 8, 2022, meeting](#), the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services, considered a petition from Ramesh Thirumalai to update the City's Bylaw to allow fireworks on Diwali. The Committee resolved:

“that the matter be referred to the Administration to report back on the implications of amending the bylaw to allow fireworks for Diwali with consideration for other cultural or religious dates.”

At its Regular Business Meeting held on [February 22, 2023](#), City Council considered a Notice of Motion and resolved:

“that the City Administration report back on including the Lunar New Year as a permitted day to use fireworks in the City of Saskatoon bylaws.”

CURRENT STATUS

The Bylaw allows for additional fireworks displays at the discretion of the Fire Chief. Certain days are set in terms of allowing fireworks without having to go through a permit process. Specifically stating that:

No person shall discharge any low hazard fireworks and no person being the owner or occupant of any premises shall permit any low hazard fireworks to be discharged except: (i) between the hours of dusk and 11:00 p.m. on Victoria Day, Canada Day, or Labour Day; or (ii) between the hours of dusk on New Year's Eve to 00:15 a.m. on New Year's Day

The Bylaw also allows community associations to conduct public fireworks displays for special events outside of the dates and times noted above by obtaining a special permit. The permit is used as a regulatory instrument to allow for celebrations and special events not recognized in the Bylaw.

The number of permits, by category, for special events and retailers from 2018 to 2022 are noted in the below table. The vendor/retailer category is considered consumer fireworks and the remaining three categories are considered display fireworks.

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Permit	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Vendor/Retailers	14	15	15	22	14
High Hazard	3	2	0	3	4
Flame	5	2	1	0	3
Pyro	16	11	3	5	10

Under the *Explosives Act*, the Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD) is required to enforce the use of fireworks within its jurisdiction. Therefore, the Fire Marshal, Deputy Fire Marshal, and Fire Inspectors must obtain their Certificate of Completion for reviewing Display Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Event Plans for consumer fireworks. They are also required to inspect and/or permit fireworks by licensed firework technicians and community associations.

Any organization, such as cultural, religious, and celebratory, can request a permit to discharge fireworks outside of the prescribed days in the Bylaw. The Fire Marshal reviews all permit requests, permit issuance, and the decision to permit or refuse is based on the information package received. Consideration must be made with the below risks identified for anyone discharging fireworks:

- Impact to community,
- Risk analysis,
- Location,
- Adjacent properties,
- Noise,
- Trajectory,
- Competency of the responsible party discharging,
- Shrapnel/debris,
- Embers and wind drift,
- Litter, and
- Emergency plan in the event of fire and/or injury.

Fire Inspectors annually inspect the sellers of low-hazard fireworks for proper storage and display, review of emergency procedures, follow up on deficiencies where identified, and ensure a permit is posted, which is required to sell fireworks.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Although the previous resolutions by City Council and the SPC on Planning, Development & Community Services acknowledged two specific cultural events/celebrations, Diwali and Lunar New Year, SFD has identified approximately 150 dates of potential religious and cultural events or celebrations.

A review of the regulatory framework in other Canadian cities shows that most have more restrictive regimes than Saskatoon. Most cities require a permit to discharge fireworks. Only Brampton, Mississauga, and Kitchener were identified as recognizing Diwali as a day where fireworks may be used without a permit in their respective

bylaws; however, public complaints in these cities regarding the use of consumer and personal fireworks during Diwali have been received. Additionally, Mississauga allows fireworks on Lunar New Year without a permit.

There are a few primary implications that emerge by expanding the number of days and times to discharge consumer fireworks, such as the amount of retail outlets selling fireworks increasing substantially relative to the status quo. This would require more resources allocated to the Fire Prevention team at SFD. A further assessment would need to be completed to determine impacts on operational response staff for incidents.

Fireworks displays can have negative impacts such as noise pollution, traffic congestion/access, firework debris, and potential fires. In 2022, according to the Saskatoon Police Service, there were 138 calls for service where fireworks were confirmed to be used. This would include only “calls related directly to fireworks or where an officer confirmed a “gunshot” call was actually fireworks”. Enforcement by the Saskatoon Police Service was not conducted; however, four individuals were given warnings.

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs advocated to the federal government in September 2022 to ban the sale and use of all consumer fireworks due to risk of injuries and fires. Their request does not include the discharge of fireworks by licensed technicians. This is currently under consideration, with no decision yet. Your Administration also supports this approach.

The Bylaw currently allows individuals to use vendor/retailer fireworks without permits on Victoria Day, Canada Day, Labour Day, and at New Years, yet not on other culturally significant days. The Administration believes to achieve consistency, it would better to remove these exemptions for discharge of fireworks without permits within Saskatoon’s corporate limits, rather than to add to them. Unpermitted fireworks displays are inherently unsafe in urban environments. Fireworks displays could still be used on any day by any party, provided the appropriate permits were in place.

SFD does accommodate special fireworks celebrations outside of the Bylaw through a permit. This process works well; however, requires advanced planning from the organizer.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Permit fees are currently \$100, which does not cover the cost of the amount of work that goes into reviewing, inspecting, and issuing the fireworks permits by the Fire Prevention team.

NEXT STEPS

The Administration will continue to review data, explore permit fee structure, and processes in other municipalities.

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Report Approval

Written by: Yvonne Raymer, Assistant Chief, Saskatoon Fire Department
Mike Jordan, Chief Public Policy and Government Relations Officer

Approved by: Morgan Hackl, Fire Chief, Saskatoon Fire Department

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