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Fourth of July fireworks all but banned from Pacifica's beaches

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PACIFICA -- Fourth of July fireworks will be all but banned from the city's beaches this year after the City Council on Monday approved tight new restrictions intended to keep the sand and Pacific Ocean cleaner.

By a 5-0 vote, the council adopted regulations that ban "safe and sane" fireworks, which generally don't fly or explode, from Rockaway Beach and seriously limit them on Linda Mar Beach.

"We're really, really thrilled," said Pacifica Beach Coalition president Lynn Adams. "Simply (it's) for the health of the ocean and the health of the animals. It harms so many."

While the restrictions are effective immediately, Independence Day fireworks will still be OK at a small area of Linda Mar, in the south parking lots at both beaches and at residents' homes.

The city task force that drew up the rules called them a compromise intended to protect the environment, while not driving away the crowds who spent over \$424,000 at "safe and sane" stands last year. Community, sports and youth groups rely on the annual windfall provided by the sales, which were allowed last year in only 14 cities in the greater Bay Area.

The changes left some worried about the future. Bill Gray, Terra Nova High School athletic director and task force member, told this newspaper previously the rules were a healthy compromise, yet he didn't know how they might impact sales. His group netted about \$11,000 in 2012, which was among the more than \$100,000 cleared by 15 organizations.

Under the new rules, "safe and sane" fireworks will only be allowed in a designated, several hundred foot section of Linda Mar, instead on the entire roughly mile-long crescent of sand. Pacifica police Chief Jim Tasa said the area will probably be roped off with yellow caution tape, but it's still being worked out.

His officers will be on the beach making sure people comply with the new regulations. Setting off "safe and sane" fireworks outside the parking lots and designated beach areas could mean a misdemeanor violation for scofflaws.

"In the transition time it could be a warning," said Tasa. "It depends."

While the so-called "safe and sane" devices remain legal in the rest of Pacifica, other kinds of fireworks are illegal and their possession carries a \$1,000 fine, said Tasa.

Safe and sane fireworks have been controversial for decades in the sleepy coasts town. But residents have voted twice -- most recently in 1996 -- to keep them, in large part because of the funding they provide to community groups.

The recent effort resulting in the new restrictions came after environmentalists, fed up after years of picking up the debris, asked the City Council to investigate keeping fireworks off the beaches. The nonprofit groups that sell the fireworks have also been part of the annual tradition of cleaning up the debris.

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