



# NEWS



## News Headlines 07/06/2021

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## Firefighters knock down a 3-acre brush fire in Lucerne Valley

Staff Writer, California News Times

Posted: July 4, 2021



Photo Cal Fire BDU

Lucerne Valley, California (VVNG.com) — Firefighters quickly gained an edge over the burning brush fire in Lucerne Valley on Saturday afternoon.

The fire was reported in the Desert View and Joshua Road areas around 12:40 pm on July 3.

A tweet from the Cal Fire BDU reported that the fire was initially 1/2 acre, moderately widespread, and prompted a complete wilderness response with the aircraft ordered. The crew worked quickly and placed delay lines around the fire to prevent the spread of fire.

Supported by **San Bernardino County Fire** and San Bernardino National Forest. The official cause of the fire is under investigation.

<https://californianewstimes.com/firefighters-knock-down-a-3-acre-brush-fire-in-lucerne-valley-vvng-com/425205/>

## Driver killed in early morning crash on Bear Valley Road in Hesperia

Staff Writer, VVNG

Posted: July 4, 2021



Figure 1 Hugo C. Valdez, VVGN.com

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com) — A 37-year-old Barstow man was killed in a single-vehicle crash on the 4th of July in Hesperia.

It happened at 4:07 am, on Sunday, July 4, 2021, at the intersection of Bear Valley and Hesperia Roads.

**San Bernardino County Fire** pronounced the driver of a silver 2004 Mazda3 deceased at the scene. A white sheet was draped over the driver's side of the vehicle.

One witness said the vehicle was traveling at a high rate of speed and for unknown reasons veered and collided with the traffic signal light pole in front of the Walgreens. The impact caused the motor of the Mazda to be thrown onto the sidewalk and the bumper to wrap around the large steel pole.

A security guard from a nearby business told VVNG he heard the impact but he never heard the sound of the brakes.

Sheriff's officials said the driver crossed from the westbound lanes to the eastbound lanes of Bear Valley Road, struck a curb, drove on the sidewalk, and collided into the traffic signal pole on the southeast corner of the intersection.

The identity of the deceased individual will be released pending notification of next of kin.

The collision remains under investigation and any witnesses are asked to contact Deputy S. Lopiccolo or Deputy D. Holland from the Hesperia Station at 760-947-1500.

<https://www.vvng.com/driver-killed-in-early-morning-crash-on-bear-valley-road-in-hesperia/>

## Fireworks blamed for starting multiple brush fires on 4th of July in the Victor Valley

Staff Writer, VVNG

Posted: July 5, 2021



VICTOR VALLEY, Calif. (VVNG.com) — Firefighters across the Victor Valley were very busy on the Fourth of July as several brush fires were started by fireworks.

Hesperia residents in the area of Danbury Avenue in the area known as the Mesa were sent into panic mode when a fire broke out just before 9:00 pm.

The fire quickly consumed a couple of acres and threatened nearby homes. At one point, deputies were going door-to-door advising residents living on Danbury about evacuations. After a fierce and extensive battle, **San Bernardino County Firefighters** were able to gain the upper hand on the fire and no homes were lost.

At about 10:30 pm, fire crews responded to a vacant lot along Rancho Road and Cottonwood Avenue after the field caught on fire. Crews placed a line around the fire and knocked it down quickly.

Phelan residents were awakened by a brush fire at about 12:10 am, in the area of Caughlin and Phelan Roads. Again fire crews worked quickly to contain the fire and keep it from spreading.

The three incidents mentioned in this article are only a small fraction compared to the actual number of fires started as a result of illegal fireworks across the Victor Valley. As a reminder, fireworks are illegal in the Victor Valley except for the city of Adelanto.

<https://www.vvng.com/fireworks-blamed-for-starting-multiple-brush-fires-on-4th-of-july-in-the-victor-valley/>

## Street gangs smuggling illegal, dangerous fireworks into Southern California

Brian Rokos, The Press Enterprise

Posted: July 2, 2021



Mike Horton, the San Bernardino County fire marshal, and deputy fire warden, moves illegal fireworks that were recently seized. Criminals say selling them is 'easier than selling drugs, it's more lucrative and the consequences are less,' Horton said. (Courtesy of San Bernardino County Fire Department)

The illegal fireworks that have been entertaining, bedeviling and injuring Southern California residents heading into the Fourth of July weekend are increasingly arriving in the state via smuggling, often by criminal street gangs that use the same techniques they employ to distribute drugs, investigators say.

Fireworks that explode, spin along the ground and launch balls of fire high into the air are often purchased legally in other states before being snuck into California, where they are prohibited. They are concealed in passenger cars, trucked in using rental vehicles and driven in caravans sometimes escorted by armed gang members.

Other such fireworks enter through the port of Long Beach from Mexico and China and are ostensibly headed out of state to be sold legally, but some somehow never make it to their intended destinations. The fireworks are then sold online, in parking lots and from warehouses at double or triple their cost.

The proceeds are then spent on firearms, said Bryan Gouge', a senior arson and bomb investigator in the state Fire Marshal's Office.

On Thursday, July 1, investigators were still sorting out the origin of a large cache of illegal fireworks and explosive devices at a house in South Los Angeles, where 17 people were injured in a huge blast Wednesday night as police attempted to safely detonate the improvised devices.

But generally, said Gouge', "What we are seeing, a large majority of the stuff seems to be linked to organized crime. You can't get these items in California. It creates a black market. What we think we are seeing as a trend is gangs running them as fundraisers."

Those types of fireworks, notable for a lack of control once they are ignited, are illegal everywhere in California, whereas the so-called safe-and-sane variety approved by the state fire marshal are legal to be lit, but only in limited areas. Gouge estimates that every year, agencies turn over 250,000 pounds of illegal fireworks to his office to be destroyed.

The sale of illegal fireworks by gangs appears to be yet another evolution of criminal activity, similar to the decline in bank robberies in the late 2000s at a time when tech-savvy criminals began putting fake debit card readers on ATMs to steal personal information — a crime that yields higher takes than bank holdups at less risk of lengthy jail or prison sentences.

“We’ve been told by the people that are bringing in the product that it’s easier than selling drugs, it’s more lucrative and the consequences are less,” said Mike Horton, the San Bernardino County fire marshal and deputy fire warden.

The penalty for possession and sale of illegal fireworks in California, depending on the agency, is usually about \$1,250 for a first offense that multiplies with each successive citation. Criminal organizations write off those fines as “overhead,” Horton said, adding that related jail sentences in San Bernardino County are rare.

Officials say they confiscate the fireworks to protect the public from themselves.

Dr. Michael Downes, an emergency medicine physician at Loma Linda University Medical Center, has already been treating fireworks injuries this year, seeing mostly burns and cuts. Sometimes the patients acknowledge being under the influence of alcohol.

Then there are the hands that come in missing digits after a rocket or cherry bomb blows up while being held.

“Usually, patients are in a state of shock, not in the physiological sense, but they are mentally in shock, saying, ‘I can’t believe my finger is gone’ and processing that new reality,” Downes said. “It’s very distressing.”

In the worst cases, people die.

The bodies of Alex Paez, 38, and Cesar Paez, 20, were found in the rubble of an Ontario home after explosions of fireworks on March 16 blasted shockwaves that were felt for miles. Officials have not announced what the cousins were doing with the fireworks or how they obtained them.

Attempts to find the fireworks take on several forms.

With it being difficult to identify those shooting off fireworks, officials are focusing on the distributors.

Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer said hundreds of online advertisements for fireworks were removed after he sent cease-and-desist letters to virtual swap meets such as Facebook Marketplace, OfferUp, Craigslist and 5Miles.

Even the safe-and-sane variety are illegal in Los Angeles which, like other California cities, is in extreme fire danger from drought.

“If we can diminish the availability of illegal fireworks ... we can take some meaningful steps in reducing the dangers of fireworks, Feuer said.

Feuer pleaded with the public to report illegal fireworks, and on Wednesday, investigators were tipped to a large stash behind the home in South LA. Police found 5,000 pounds of aerial fireworks assortments with benign names such as Cinco De Mayo and House Party.

Investigators also discovered more than 200 IEDs that were moved to a trailer that was supposed to safely contain their detonation. But the blast destroyed the trailer, injured 17 people and damaged homes and cars.

Arturo Cejas III, 27, was arrested on suspicion of reckless or malicious possession of a destructive device. Investigators have not announced the exact source of the fireworks, but Police Chief Michel Moore said they were brought from out of state “for resale to members of the community.”

In Riverside, where safe-and-sane fireworks are banned, a task force is looking for and confiscating fireworks by following up on tips and monitoring social media, Fire Chief Michael Moore said.

He and other officials said they hope residents will attend the public fireworks shows that are returning this year after being canceled in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sgt. Tim Pusztai has worked with illegal fireworks at the Orange County Sheriff’s Department’s Hazardous Devices Section for 20 years.

He said he’s noticed an exponential increase in illegal fireworks activity in the past five years in a county where safe-and-sane are allowed in 10 cities. In one instance, in Santa Ana, that department seized 5,000 pounds of illegal fireworks from one man who paid about \$20,000 for them. His profit would have likely more than doubled if he had sold them, Pusztai said.

Several other agencies have recently announced seizures.

In Corona, where all fireworks are illegal, officials confiscated 200 aerial rockets from a 19-year-old. In Fontana, where safe-and-sane fireworks are allowed only south of Summit Avenue, a repeat offender faces a \$10,000 fine for selling fireworks that explode or that can be launched. In Chino Hills, San Bernardino County sheriff’s deputies cited a man and a woman who had about 150 pounds of fireworks labeled among other things as “Death Disco.”

Two of the largest seizures focused on vehicles returning to San Bernardino County from Nevada, where fireworks from sparklers to skyrockets are sold legally.

Cal Fire peace officers staked out some of the smaller roads in May and June and stopped almost 1,000 vehicles that violated traffic laws or that had fireworks visible, resulting in the seizure of more than 79,000 pounds of fireworks.

At least 75% of the vehicles contained fireworks, said Daniel Berlant, Cal Fire’s assistant deputy director. Many contained at least 100 pounds of fireworks, an indication that they were intended to be resold, he said.

And in a separate operation in May and June along the 15 Freeway near the Nevada border, investigators from agencies including San Bernardino County fire seized 18,725 pounds of fireworks that included aerial mortars, M80s and strings of a thousand firecrackers, many of which appeared headed for other counties, Horton said.

Investigators wrote 99 citations that seek \$111,250 in fines.

Horton said he expects that seizure total to double in the coming days if the anticipated help comes. San Bernardino County is among the fire departments with websites that accept tips from the public on illegal fireworks displays and caches.

“It’s extremely effective,” Horton said. “We can’t do this without the community’s help.”

<https://www.pe.com/2021/07/01/street-gangs-smuggling-illegal-dangerous-fireworks-into-southern-california/>