



DTSC puts the “safe” into Safe and Sane fireworks

Roman candles, bottle rockets, M-80’s and cherry bombs are among the illegal fireworks prevalent in California, especially around the Independence Day holiday. Check out [this story](#) out of Bakersfield from July – about police seizing 400 pounds of illegal fireworks from a man who had been selling them from the trunk of his car.

Police and fire officials work to keep illegal pyrotechnics off the street because they’re dangerous. But what happens to them after they’ve been seized? As it turns out, they are handed over to specially trained arson investigators who store them in secure facilities scattered around California.

When the caches become full, the fire agencies call out Department of Toxic Substances Control’s emergency response team. Illegal fireworks are considered hazardous waste, and DTSC is trained to dispose of them in a safe matter.

The most recent occurrence was in August, when over the course of four scorching hot days several elite officers from CalFire and DTSC Emergency Response Coordinator George Baker moved and re-packaged almost 25,000 pounds of potentially dangerous fireworks.

The pyrotechnics occupied 24 pallets, and were hauled under manifest to a permitted incinerator in Louisiana. CalFire will reimburse DTSC about \$125,000 in disposal costs.

DTSC is summoned to move and dispose of illegal fireworks every couple of years, said Baker, who works in the Cypress office. The work requires skill and care because the fireworks aren’t always stable. Some come from Nevada, Mexico or China. Seizures have often included high-explosive improvised devices that must be detonated on scene.

Illegal fireworks are kind of like a box of chocolates, said Baker: “You never know what you’re gonna get.”



Left: Collected fireworks in need of proper disposal.

Right: A few of the 24 pallets of fireworks ready for transport.

