

The ?Fireworks? About Fireworks!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It's a topic sure to make some people's tempers flare, and one that gets many others all worked up and ready to explode. What are we talking about today? Fireworks! Love ?em or hate ?em everyone has an opinion and with summer's first long weekend just behind us, now seems like an appropriate time to weigh in on the recent bylaw passed to ban personal fireworks for any reason, including special holidays.

Effective April 26, 2022 the Town of Caledon banned the discharge of fireworks for personal use, as well as the sale of fireworks for the same reason. The ban arose as a result, at least in part, from both in person and online consultations and an online survey. It means that only public displays (such as for community events) with a permit are now allowed. The bylaw outlines specific requirements for safety including a minimum distance of 300m from various building types and that the display must take place under the guidance of a licensed supervisor. Perhaps you saw video footage of recent events in the Toronto area where fireworks were being used as weapons and actually being discharged directly into crowds where at least one hit a police officer in the face causing severe burns? Several others were seriously injured too. Such careless disregard (no doubt fuelled by various substances in addition to the fuelled up fireworks) for human life is just one of the reasons communities like ours are now enacting bylaws in an attempt to curb the dangerous discharge of fireworks.

For anyone with a particularly long memory, I believe I have written about the topic of fireworks at least once before. I know that I had strong feelings about them, not the least of which was that people who think it is ok to have fireworks displays on the May ?two-four? weekend and Canada Day, should also be prepared to allow them for other significant holidays like Diwali and Lunar New Year celebrations.

That's not to say I think fireworks in fumbling fingered, non-professional hands are a good idea, just that equity demands equal access. Now however, with the decision to remove access to fireworks from everyone, (equality for all in this case meaning no access for anyone) it's safe to say we are finally beginning to grasp the realities of the bigger picture harms that arise from their wanton use.

I admit this has been a learning curve for me. It's not as simple as claiming they do comparatively little harm and I do think they are beautiful to look at, because what we do know, in fact, is that they can (and do) cause irreparable harm. So we must do better. Young, male teens between 15-19 experienced injuries more often than most any other age group, with children aged 10-14 coming in a close second. Burns to the head, face and neck are common and eye injuries (some of which are permanent) follow closely behind. These are Canadian statistics but based on my research, they are similar to results in both the US and UK. As well, these statistics don't address larger issues including fires resulting in property damage and the significant and potentially dangerous litter left behind.

Additionally, the potential harm to animals (including domestic, wildlife and farm) is significant and the loud, unpredictable and explosive nature of fireworks is extremely problematic for some families living with trauma (refugees from war torn countries) and/or those experiencing autism or other neuro-diversities for whom such noise, bright lights and distractions can make life very difficult indeed.

Should fireworks displays cease to exist? Of course not! In the right hands, fireworks are bold, beautiful and bright and have long been associated with celebrations and special occasions. Some even choose fireworks displays as part of memorable ceremonies such as weddings. Scheduled fireworks however, give families the opportunity to CHOOSE whether it is right for them to attend, vs. being subjected to noisy neighbours mishandling fireworks in dangerous circumstances. Designated areas for displays are, more often than not, locations that have established a suitable proximity away from certain places like senior community living spaces, hospitals and agricultural settings, helping to minimize the potential harms to vulnerable sectors and this is a good thing.

I have every reason to believe that the majority of us, who haven't given this topic a second thought, haven't done so because we just aren't interested in blowing things up in our backyard. Those that have thought about it ? and who are complaining loudly on community forums about their ?right? to light things up are the loudest voices of all ? perhaps even louder than the ruckus caused by fireworks!