



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: June 23, 2025

FROM: Municipal Enforcement Services Department
Oakville Fire Department

DATE: June 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Sale and Discharge of Consumer Fireworks – Community
Engagement Summary

LOCATION: Town-wide
WARD: Town-wide

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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That By-law 2025-082, a by-law to prohibit and regulate the sale and discharge of fireworks within the Town of Oakville, and to repeal By-law 2009-056, attached as Appendix A to the report from Municipal Enforcement Services dated June 10, 2025 be passed.
2. That By-law 2025-083, a by-law to amend Licensing By-law 2015-075 attached as Appendix B to the report from Municipal Enforcement Services dated June 10, 2025 be passed.
3. That the Rates and Fees Schedule for Municipal Enforcement Services – Licensing be amended to delete fees for fireworks vendor.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- This report responds to a direction from Council on November 20, 2023, that “Council and staff consult with the public on the use and sale of consumer fireworks and report back to Council in the Fall of 2024”

- In-person sessions with Municipal Enforcement Services (MES) and Oakville Fire staff were held on June 5, 2024 at Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre and on June 11, 2024 at Town Hall
- Staff enlisted the services of Forum Research Inc. to assist in conducting telephone interviews and an online questionnaire running from May 24 through June 21, 2024
- Forum Research has provided a summary and analysis of the data collected attached as Appendix C to this report
- MES is recommending prohibiting the discharge and sale of consumer fireworks to prioritize health and safety while addressing concerns related to noise, property damage, fire risks, environmental impact, and the well-being of people, pets, and wildlife
- Businesses selling display fireworks and special effect pyrotechnics will not require a business license and they will not be permitted to sell consumer fireworks. The discharge of display fireworks, consumer fireworks and special effect pyrotechnics would remain permissible, provided no person, except a fireworks supervisor or pyrotechnician, discharge any fireworks or pyrotechnics under a permit obtained from the Fire Department
- Residents would not be allowed to use consumer fireworks other than sparklers, Christmas crackers or caps for toy guns to celebrate holidays, religious, or cultural events. However, communities could apply for a permit to host a display fireworks event conducted by a certified professional

BACKGROUND:

At the Council meeting of November 20, 2023, Council directed that staff consult with the public and solicit input on the use and sale of consumer fireworks in Oakville.

In-person sessions with Municipal Enforcement Services (MES) and Oakville Fire staff were held on June 5, 2024 at Queen Elizabeth Park Community and Cultural Centre and on June 11, 2024 at Town Hall. Participation at these two public meetings was limited with only 4 members of the public and two industry representatives in attendance.

Municipal Enforcement Services retained Forum Research Inc. (Forum Research) to conduct telephone interviews with a small, randomly selected subset of Oakville residents, and conduct an online questionnaire.

Online Questionnaire

The broad reach of the internet provides the municipality with the ability to connect with an unprecedented number of residents in a cost-efficient and timely manner,

however, it does pose a unique challenge when attempting to qualify the suitability of respondents.

To enhance the data's usefulness, staff considered qualifying a participant's eligibility based on several criteria:

- a participant's residency, ensuring responses came from individuals most suited to provide relevant insights
- limiting responses from multiple family members from the same household responding to the questionnaire
- limiting individuals from submitting multiple responses

Most of the qualifying criteria mentioned above was subsequently dismissed as being too invasive to a respondent's privacy.

For online submissions, Forum Research was able to identify IP addresses that had participated in the online questionnaire and were instructed to limit responses to one per address.

Telephone Interviews

Ultimately, staff decided to establish a smaller control group of telephone respondents to compare against online results. The telephone group was screened by confirming Oakville residency via landline or a brief residency question, immediately discontinuing the telephone interview if the respondent was not a resident of Oakville. This measure aimed to protect result integrity ensuring the accurate representation of community views.

Both the online questionnaire and the telephone interviews used identical questions and logic mapping. For detailed, multi-answer questions, call takers recorded responses without prompting, categorizing them appropriately.

Licensing Firework Vendors

Licensing By-law 2015-075 requires that businesses selling fireworks in Oakville obtain a firework vendor licence. In 2017, a total of eleven (11) licensed firework vendors were permitted to sell Consumer fireworks, including one vendor authorized to sell both Consumer fireworks, Display fireworks and Pyrotechnics. By 2024, only one vendor remained licensed to sell Consumer fireworks, which is the same vendor also permitted to retail Display fireworks.

Staff recommend eliminating the licensing requirement for firework vendors from the Licensing By-law alongside the prohibition of Consumer firework sales. The retailer currently authorized to sell Display fireworks and Pyrotechnics, will be permitted to continue doing so without a municipal licence as they are regulated by the Explosives Act. However, this retailer will no longer be permitted to sell Consumer-grade fireworks to the public. Display-grade fireworks and pyrotechnics will be restricted to purchasers authorized under the *Explosives Act*.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

Analyzing the Findings

The findings from the online questionnaire and telephone interviews are detailed in the report prepared by Forum Research Inc. (attached as Appendix C). The primary focus of their report is to identify and highlight trends within the data. The analysis and recommendations based on these results represent the perspective of Forum Research and offer valuable insights to inform the decision-making process.

Results

The findings of Forum Research strongly suggest that banning the sale and discharge of consumer/family fireworks in Oakville would align with community sentiment and address pressing public safety and environmental concerns. Key insights include:

- **Strong Resident Concern:** The overwhelming concern about fireworks use (67% of telephone respondents and 88% of online respondents) demonstrates a shared unease among residents, making this a priority issue.
- **Perceived Irresponsible Usage:** The perception that only 63% of telephone respondents and 30% of online respondents believe residents use fireworks responsibly reveals a substantial trust gap in safe practices, emphasizing the need for stricter regulations.
- **Limited Direct Engagement:** With only a small proportion of residents purchasing (17% telephone, 16% online) or attending fireworks events (16% telephone, 21% online), it appears that the activity's benefits are limited while its negative impacts extend broadly to the community.
- **Public Safety and Environmental Risks:** The associated dangers—fire hazards, noise, injury risks, and environmental harm—further justify restrictive measures.

Safe Use of Fireworks Study

Natural Resources Canada issues a guideline to inform the fireworks industry and the public on the design, performance and safe use of consumer/display grade fireworks - [Guidelines for Authorization of Consumer and Display Fireworks](#). The Guidelines indicate that labels on Consumer fireworks **must** include the following information:

- Maximum height of the effect
- Safe separation distance for spectators
- For angled articles, an arrow indicating the direction of the effect/fire/flame

Part 16 subsection 358(1) of the Explosives Regulations published under the *Explosives Act* clearly articulates the importance of adhering to the requirements included on the packaging of Consumer Fireworks.

- **358 (1)** *When using consumer fireworks, a user, other than a certified display supervisor or a display assistant under the direct supervision of a certified display supervisor, **must** follow the instructions provided on the label of the consumer fireworks, and if there are no such instructions, the consumer fireworks must not be used*

The use of aerial fireworks requires a wide clear site away from all obstacles such as buildings, trees and overhead wires. Spectators are to maintain a safe distance from the point of ignition as outlined on the firework's label. Safe Spector Distance outlined in the NRC guideline is two times (2x) the height of the effect of a vertical firework and two and one half times (2½x) the height of the effect of an angled firework, measured in metres.

After reviewing various consumer firework packages and consulting with a locally licensed retailer, staff examined one of the lowest-reaching vertical fireworks available—the Roman Candle. Based on in-store and online research, the vertical height of Roman Candle effects ranged between 15 and 20 metres. Staff determined that 17.5 metres represented a reasonable average for this type of firework and used it as the basis for this study. This benchmark was applied to assess the suitability of such fireworks in urban environments. Notably, this height is significantly lower than that of other consumer fireworks, such as cakes and mortars, which can reach up to 40 metres.

Safe separation distance for spectators for aerial fireworks is directly proportional to the vertical height that the fireworks can achieve. For example, a small aerial firework such as a roman candle that reaches an average height of 17.5 m requires a circular spectator safety zone with a diameter of 70 meters around its launch site.

This is calculated by taking the height of the firework x2 (radius required by NRC guideline) and then x2 again to determine the diameter of the safety circle.

Town staff conducted a review of all residential properties in Oakville to determine how many could provide the required safe spectator distance for a 17.5-meter-high aerial firework. The review found that only 151 out of 43,949 residential properties met the necessary safe spectator distance criteria. However, this number does not account for potential overhead hazards, such as tree canopies and wires, which could significantly reduce or even eliminate the number of properties suitable for the use of aerial fireworks. This number also does not account for fireworks that can be legally purchased that can reach a height of over twice that of the study height.

Similarly, a study conducted by the Town of Milton Fire Department reached the same conclusion: most properties in Milton lack the space required for the safe use of aerial fireworks. As such, there is no viable case to support their widespread, safe use in either community.

The findings highlight that the continued use and sale of aerial fireworks creates a false impression that these devices can be safely used within Oakville, despite the significant limitations posed by residential property sizes and safety requirements. With ostensibly no properties meeting the required spectator distance for aerial fireworks as mandated by the Federal Government, their use presents significant risks to both public safety and the environment.

Oakville Fire Chief's Perspective

Following a review of this report, the Fire Chief expressed significant concern regarding the continued sale and discharge of consumer fireworks. Specifically, the Chief noted the scarcity of properties in Oakville large enough to accommodate the recommended safe spectator distance outlined within the fireworks guidelines published by Natural Resources Canada. This raises serious safety concerns due to the potential for fire, property damage, and personal injury.

The Fire Chief highlighted a growing trend in municipalities such as Brampton, Milton, and Woodstock banning family fireworks, a measure the Chief personally supports. The Chief also emphasized that this position aligns with the messaging of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) and other fire chiefs across Canada, representing a nationwide perspective on the risks associated with consumer fireworks.

Additionally, the Chief underscored the significant safety risks posed by unsupervised and unregulated fireworks use. Incidents in Oakville have demonstrated the potential for civil disturbances and serious harm, including injuries, property damage, and threats to public safety. While professional fireworks

displays—conducted by individuals certified under the Explosives Act and approved through municipal permitting processes—can be spectacular and are supported by the Chief, they still present inherent risks. However, these risks are far less frequent and are typically mitigated by comprehensive safety and emergency plans, which are absent in amateur use.

Operational and Cost Impacts on Parks and Open Space

The Parks and Open Space department has reported ongoing challenges due to fireworks in town parks. Key issues include:

- **Litter and Debris:** Fireworks leave significant waste, often requiring dedicated cleanup crews to remove remnants from playgrounds, splash pads, and general park areas. This has resulted in an estimated annual cleanup cost of \$7,200.
- **Vandalism:** Fireworks are frequently misused to damage public property, including in-ground waste receptacles and public washrooms. Over the past two years, five (5) waste containers (\$20,000 total) and four (4) public washrooms (\$5,000 total) have required repairs due to firework-related vandalism.
- **Increased Enforcement Needs:** Parks Patrol staff receive a high volume of complaints, including noise disturbances, fire risks, and park curfew violations. Responding to these concerns diverts resources from other essential park maintenance activities.

Insights from Municipal Bans

Staff examined four municipalities—Milton, Woodstock, Brampton and Halton Hills—that implemented fireworks bans within the past year. Most reported a noticeable reduction in complaint volumes following the bans:

- **Woodstock:** Complaints dropped significantly, from over 50 in 2023 to only a handful in 2024 after the ban was enacted earlier in the year.
- **Brampton:** While complaints remain relatively high, there has been a substantial decrease over two years since the ban's implementation.
- **Milton:** Staff observed a decline in fireworks-related concerns since the ban took effect on November 13, 2023.
- **Halton Hills:** Passed a by-law prohibiting the sale and discharge of consumer fireworks on January 20, 2025. Due to its recency, the effectiveness of this legislation has yet to be tested.

Education & Enforcement

Municipalities emphasized that the success of a fireworks ban hinges on robust public education efforts. Different approaches were used:

- **Woodstock and Milton:** Focused on traditional media, social media campaigns, and officer-led education initiatives.
- **Brampton:** Expanded outreach efforts significantly, using bus shelter advertisements, flyers, multilingual postcards distributed at malls and grocery stores, and radio advertisements.
- **Halton Hills:** Focus will be in two areas: past vendors of fireworks and the public. Communication tactics will include social media, web banners, e-newsletters and advertisements.

Additional Measures in Brampton

To support its public education and enforcement strategies, Brampton implemented further initiatives:

- **Alternative Celebrations:** Offering City-led professionally organized fireworks displays as a safe and controlled option for residents.
- **Enhanced Staffing:** Tripling staff presence on traditional fireworks dates, including assigning non-by-law staff to patrol in marked by-law vehicles.
- **Police Collaboration:** Budgeting for six paid-duty police officers to partner with 40 by-law officers working paid overtime, strategically organized into enforcement teams.

Brampton's proactive education and enforcement efforts have proven increasingly effective. Diwali complaints dropped from over 1,000 in 2023 to 161 in 2024, with fines issued declining from over 100 to just 12. Similarly, New Year's complaints saw a slight decrease, demonstrating the sustained impact of consistent public education and enforcement strategies.

Conclusion

Staff recommend prohibiting the discharge and sale of fireworks in the Town of Oakville to address significant public safety concerns, reduce the risk of firework-related vandalism, and minimize disturbances to residents and wildlife. This approach aligns with public sentiment, enhances community well-being, and ensures a safer and more peaceful environment for all. If this prohibition is approved, the Licensing By-law will also be amended to delete the requirement for a firework vendor licence. These by-laws are attached to this report as Appendix A and B.

MES staff also recommend implementing an education and public awareness program to support the rollout of the by-law in 2025. In 2026, MES will enhance enforcement efforts by introducing four part-time officers to support compliance measures.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

Should the recommendations be approved staff will develop a public education campaign to inform residents and vendors about the prohibition on the discharge and sale of consumer fireworks.

(B) FINANCIAL

If Council approves a by-law prohibiting the discharge and sale of consumer fireworks, additional resources will be required for both a program of public education in 2025 with additional resources for proactive and reactive enforcement in 2026. Municipal Enforcement Services recommends requesting \$5,000 for a public education campaign in conjunction with the by-law approval. This funding, proposed as a capital request, would be sourced from the tax stabilization reserve to ensure adequate support for the implementation and enforcement of the new by-law.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

Municipal Enforcement Services, Legal, Parks and the Fire Department have been involved in the review process.

(D) CORPORATE STRATEGIC GOALS

This report addresses the corporate strategic goal(s) to:

- Continuously improve our programs and services
- Provide outstanding service to our residents and businesses

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

This report addresses climate change and air quality by eliminating contaminant release associated with the temporary enjoyment of fireworks

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Fireworks By-law 2025-082

Appendix B – Licensing By-law 2025-083

Appendix C – Forum Research Report

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