

No doubt there were some residents on Oahu on New Year's Eve who popped firecrackers simply because it would be the last time they would be able to do so legally. The City Council ordinance banning fireworks was long in the making. Over the years we have all heard the stories of the negative effects of our cultural reveling in fireworks. People suffered asthma attacks or other respiratory conditions. At times the thick smoke obscured clear views for drivers, which made driving dangerous. Booming bomb sounds severely frightened dogs and other house pets. The rubbish of red paper and wrappers were an eyesore and issue of neighborhood cleanliness. Firemen worked double time putting out fires caused by sparks from fireworks that landed and ignited houses, cars, and other property.

We all understand the cultural role that fireworks plays in our two annual celebrations. What we really need is goodwill and concern for neighbors, responsible use of the fireworks, and self-restraint. Unfortunately, those with access to the fireworks were using them to make bombs that jolt the hearing or worse, the property, of others and pose serious risk of fire even outside of New Year's Eve or the Fourth of July. With all of the phone calls to police and lawmakers, we finally had to take action for the sake of the safety of our residents, even if it meant that fireworks use by many law-abiding persons would be curbed.

Last year the Legislature passed a bill to address the issue of illegal fireworks, which became Act 170, and created the Illegal Fireworks Task Force. The Task Force brought together industry representatives, law enforcement, and agency representatives from the federal, state, and county levels: Hawaii Trucking Association and Matson Navigation Company (shippers); two lobbyists for the fireworks industry; the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; Federal Aviation Administration; U.S. Customs & Border Protection; Coast Guard; U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission; state Departments of Agriculture, of Transportation, of Public Safety, and of Defense; the State Fire Council; fire and police departments from each county; and the prosecuting attorney for Honolulu and Maui county. Representative Faye Hanohano, chair of the House Committee on Public Safety, and I co-chaired the Task Force.

For six months, these agency and industry representatives looked at the statistics, debated many aspects of the issue, and came up with possible methods for addressing the problem. They

approved their final report just before the Legislature opened. The report summarizes the current incidence of illegal fireworks use in all four counties, commercial and law enforcement climate, and recommendations to the Legislature.

The Task Force made several recommendations:

- increase fees and fines to deter these activities;
- direct these fees and fines toward more resources for law enforcement and education;
- possible decriminalization of offenses in favor of civil fines to make enforcement easier;
- granting cargo inspection authority to other city and state agencies;
- expanding inspection authority and increasing random inspections of cargo, including using dogs that are especially trained to sniff out explosives;
- focus cargo inspections to make them more manageable and effective; and
- establishing a reward system similar to CrimeStoppers to encourage reporting of fireworks violations.

The recommendations and report of the Illegal Fireworks Task Force have been presented to the Legislature. It would be ideal if civic concern for the community and respect for the law were enough to control fireworks use. Sadly, because it is not, government has to step in for the protection of the community. Please join us in creating a safer environment by stopping the use of illegal fireworks in Hawaii.