

GENERAL FIREWORKS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES –SEPTEMBER 15, 2025, 9:00AM-12:00PM

Hybrid Committee Meeting



Meeting Location:

Office of the State Fire Marshal
2nd Floor, OSFM Conference Room 02-221
715 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

1. CALL TO ORDER

A. Welcome and Introductions

Division Chief Deputy Brice Bennett opened the meeting with logistics briefing, stating the committee meeting will follow the open meeting requirements as set forth by the Bagley-Keene Act. Chief Bennett encouraged the attendees to keep their camera on during the meeting and to mute their microphone if not actively speaking to prevent audio overlap. He asked the attendees to state their name prior to speaking each time as clarification for meeting minutes. Deputy Bennett also mentioned to the members of the public that there will be an opportunity to speak and to please limit the comments to 3 minutes. He also provided instructions regarding an emergency situation for those in person.

B. Roll Call/Determine Quorum

Members Present:

Kevin Crews, Volt Live
Ian Gilfillan, Pyro-Spectaculars North
Amy Nygren, Sacramento Metro Fire District
Gary Brown, Pyro-Spectaculars
Linda Hass-Kreman, Phantom Fireworks
Julie Heckman, American Pyrotechnic Association
Dennis Revell, Revell Communications
Tad Trout, TNT Fireworks
Logan Herrera, Lander Challenge

Members Absent:

Antonio Solares, Orange County Fire Authority
Frank Muccio, Reaction Research Society
Janice Van Mullen, Huntington Beach Fire Department
Alan Turner, Independent Pyrotechnic Operator
Mark Holthouse, Friends of Amateur Rocketry

Office of State Fire Marshal Staff:

Chief Frank Bigelow, Deputy Director
Chief Andrew Henning, Assistant Deputy Director
Chief Brice Bennett, CALFIRE, Division Chief
Chief Jeff Schwartz, CALFIRE, Supervising Deputy State Fire Marshal III
Chairperson Caleb Phillips, CALFIRE, Deputy State Fire Marshall Specialist III
Vijay Mepani, CALFIRE, Deputy State Fire Marshall Specialist III
Cortney Walker, Staff Services Manager I
Kemiko Tolon, CALFIRE, Program Assistant
Christopher Dale, CALFIRE, Associate Governmental Program Analyst
Thomas Setnan, CALFIRE Associate Governmental Program Analyst

Public Guests:

Wes Maxey, Calfire, Assistant Deputy Director of Legislative
Jamie Sammut, Attorney
Chris Baker, Calfire Information Officer
Christine McMorrow, Deputy Director Strategic Communications
Kara Garrett, DSFM Community Risk Reduction

C. Introductions

Chief Daniel Berlant opened the meeting by addressing the reappointment of committee members and expressed his appreciation for the long-standing members, stakeholders, and representatives from the fire service and fireworks industry. He acknowledged their ongoing contributions and emphasized the importance of their collaboration in improving fireworks safety and enforcement throughout California.

Chief Berlant introduced the committee's discussion of the tragic Esparto Incident, which occurred on July 1st, noting that a full overview presentation would be provided during this meeting. He stated that such tragedies warrant a thorough examination of current laws, with a focus on ensuring those who fail to comply are held accountable. He urged the committee to review existing regulations to ensure California continues to address the challenges of illegal fireworks, including the injuries and fires resulting from unsafe or unlawful use.

He stressed that there is much to learn from this incident and that it is critical to identify any regulatory gaps or enforcement challenges. The ongoing investigation, including judicial proceedings, will help determine if loopholes contributed to the event.

Chief Berlant also reported on recent enforcement activity, highlighting the scale and seriousness of illegal fireworks activity across the state. He shared that:

- A recent sting operation led to the confiscation of over 500,000 pounds of illegal fireworks.
- Prior to the July 4th holiday, authorities had already seized more than 250 tons of illegal fireworks through the combined efforts of local agencies and the State Fire Marshal's Arson and Bomb Investigation Unit.

Despite these efforts, Chief Berlant emphasized that illegal activity remains prolific and increasingly blatant. He called for swift action from the committee and underscored the role of the newly assembled Public Safety Enforcement Task Force, which includes fire service and law enforcement partners. The task force will work to develop recommendations for enhanced enforcement strategies and potential regulatory changes.

Chief Berlant concluded by reaffirming California's commitment to public safety and maintaining its position as having the most stringent fireworks laws in the nation.

D. Approval of Past Meeting Minutes – (May 21, 2025)

Division Chief Brice Bennett requested approval of the meeting minutes from May 21st. Member Amy Nygren made a motion to approve the minutes which was seconded by Member Linda Hass. The motion passed unanimously with all present committee members voting in favor.

E. Announcements and Division Updates

Division Chief Brice Bennett introduced himself as the newly appointed Chief of the Fire and Engineering Investigations Unit. He acknowledged the recent retirements of Chief Greg Anderson and Deputy Chief Patricia Sutter, recognizing their service and contributions. Chief Bennett noted that the hiring process is currently underway to fill Deputy Sutter's position, as well as additional vacancies within the Arson and Bomb Investigation Unit.

2. OLD BUSINESS

A. Fireworks Regulation Update

Deputy Caleb Phillips reported that staff has completed approximately 85% of the recommended fireworks regulations package. He stated that the intent is to submit the finalized package to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) within the next few months.

B. Interstate Compact White Paper

Chief Andrew Henning provided an update on his recent discussions with the Nevada State Fireworks Team regarding their regulatory authority. He explained that Nevada only regulates commercial fireworks used for shows and performances, and that all consumer fireworks are illegal unless approved by individual counties.

Chief Henning noted that Nevada's approach is similar in process to California's in some areas but differs significantly in scope and enforcement. He stated that any effort to expand regulatory authority in Nevada—such as through the Nevada State Fire Marshal's Office—would require engagement with the Nevada Board of Fire Services and possibly a Bill Draft Request.

He also suggested that it may be worth evaluating funding options for an interstate compact or cooperative system that could support enhanced tracking and reporting of fireworks sales, and potentially designate regulatory authority within Nevada. Considerations, he added, should include implementation costs and agency responsibilities.

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Informational Presentation on the Fireworks Program

Deputy Caleb Phillips delivered a PowerPoint presentation providing an overview of the Fireworks Licensing program, with a focus on the Esparto incident. He began with background information on the program, emphasizing its role in ensuring that qualified individuals handle fireworks and conduct public displays safely. The program issues 32 unique licenses across three categories, establishing requirements and standards that enhance public safety by regulating the products available to the public.

The presentation covered the following key topics:

- Legal Framework: Referencing the Health and Safety Code Division 1, Part 2, Section 12500, California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Public Safety Code, Division 1, State Fire Marshal Chapter 6, Jurisdiction.
- Types of Fireworks: Classification into Dangerous and Safe and Sane fireworks.
- Licensing Overview: Categories including Company, Operator, and Device classifications, licensing requirements, and renewal timeframes.
- Role of Authority Having Jurisdiction: Responsibilities of local enforcement agencies.
- Common Violations: Frequent infractions observed in the industry.

Following this, Division Chief Brice Bennett presented the Esparto Origin and Cause overview, noting the ongoing investigation into the tragic incident. He explained the role of the Arson and Bomb Investigation Unit, which assists smaller agencies lacking the resources to conduct complex investigations. Specifically, Esparto Fire Protection requested support from the Cal Fire Arson and Bomb team. Chief Bennett highlighted the collaborative nature of the team, which works with local, federal, and state partners to provide a comprehensive investigation.

Chief Bennett also provided an Esparto Licensing overview. He stated that, following the investigation related to the July 1st **incident**, the Office of the State Fire Marshal revoked the pyrotechnic licenses of the individuals and companies involved due to multiple violations of fireworks laws and regulations. He further explained the process for the seizure and disposal of illegal fireworks, which falls under the responsibility of the Arson and Bomb Unit. This unit ensures safe transport and destruction of confiscated fireworks outside of the state.

Chairperson Caleb Phillips continued the presentation by addressing the community impact of fireworks, particularly the risks posed by illegal fireworks. He discussed the widespread negative effects on air quality and concluded with an overview of prevention and outreach efforts.

Additional key points were raised by Chief Andrew Henning, including the formation of the Public Safety Fireworks Enforcement Task Force. This task force, composed exclusively of fire service and law enforcement members (with no industry participation), will review current state laws and regulations and develop recommendations to enhance enforcement and compliance. The task force plans to collaborate with local law enforcement and fire agencies to create a comprehensive enforcement strategy to combat illegal fireworks statewide. The task force is scheduled to meet later this year and aims to issue a formal report in 2026.

The presentation concluded with the provision of relevant contact information and resources for committee members.

4. OPEN FORUM

Dennis Revell inquired about a potential connection between the recent fireworks seizure and the Esparto incident. Chief Brice Bennett responded that, as the investigation is ongoing, no additional details have been released at this time. He assured the committee that relevant information will be shared once the investigation is concluded.

Mr. Revell also announced the appointment of Joe Rodriguez as the new Fire Chief in Nevada.

Member Gary Brown requested a status update on the regulatory package, emphasizing the importance of expediting its approval. He noted the committee's eagerness to provide new recommendations and suggest revisions as necessary.

Mr. Revell further asked about any updates related to Section 1403. Chief Andrew Henning stated that staff is working with the administration on the legislative report concerning Section 1403 and has received comments. He explained that this section is a key component of the state's tenant enforcement strategy for fireworks and plays a role in training initiatives.

Mr. Revell requested that this topic be reviewed at the next meeting. Chief Henning advised that discussion would need to wait until the courts have finalized their review with the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Chief Bennett added that all pertinent documents will be shared with committee members online as soon as they become available.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Christopher Cabaldon, State Senator representing District 3, which includes Yolo, Napa, Sonoma, Sacramento, and Contra Costa counties, thanked the committee for the

opportunity to speak regarding the tragic Esparto explosion. He expressed appreciation to Chief Daniel Berlant and the investigative team for their thorough work.

Senator Cabaldon conveyed his commitment, alongside his team, to collaborate on developing effective solutions. Based on consultations with the State Fire Marshal, county officials, and representatives from the pyrotechnics industry, he has introduced SB 828. This legislation aims to close existing loopholes in California's fireworks laws by requiring licensees to demonstrate that the Office of the State Fire Marshal has obtained the appropriate permits.

He described the bill as a starting point and expressed readiness to work closely with the State Fire Marshal, the Public Safety Enforcement Task Force, and other stakeholders to refine the legislation to make a meaningful impact on fireworks safety in California.

Member Ian Gilfilan commented that while the senator's remarks were difficult to hear, he hopes the General Fireworks Advisory Committee will take a keen interest in reviewing the proposed regulations.

6. UPCOMING MEETING DATES

January 27, 2026

April 21, 2026

July 21, 2026

October 27, 2026

7. MEETING ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Member Amy Nygren and seconded by Member Ian Gilfilan. The motion was unanimously approved.

This notice and copies of the written materials have been posted on the Office of the State Fire Marshal website <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/>. For information concerning the Committee meeting, please contact the OSFM Fireworks Program at fwx@fire.ca.gov. Any written reports being provided to the Committee members in advance of the public meeting will also be available to the public upon request.

In accordance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, reasonable accommodations are available. Requests for reasonable accommodation should be made at least five (5) working days prior to the meeting date. To request reasonable accommodations, including documents in alternative formats, please contact the OSFM Fireworks Program at fwx@fire.ca.gov.