

Fireworks stands under fire

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Village considering ban on sale of pyrotechnics, or setting inspection fee

With two tents set up on either side of Highway 33 this summer, it could be argued that Saukville was the fireworks capital of Ozaukee County.

That could change, if notions discussed last week by the village's Public Safety Committee are put into effect.

The village granted TNT Fireworks a temporary permit to run both fireworks stands in anticipation of the Fourth of July, but not without some criticism from the fire department about untrained volunteers selling the pyrotechnics.

The permits required the sales tents be made of fire-resistant material and fireworks be stored in fire-proof vaults when not being displayed.

Fire Chief Gilly Schultz renewed concerns about the fireworks stands during last week's committee meeting, citing cost rather than safety issues.

"Either we adopt an ordinance that says we don't let these people in or we raise the permit fee," Schultz said.

TNT Fireworks paid \$200 to cover the cost of a conditional-use permit hearing for the fireworks stands. In addition, each vendor working at the stand needed to secure a transient merchant permit, which costs \$45.

The problem, Schultz said, is the fire department has to conduct a careful inspection of the stands before they are allowed to open. In addition, police make routine checks while they are operating.

"I feel just letting these people in to sell that stuff is ridiculous," he said.

"Why are we going through all of this for nothing? It is a real headache for us and they are the ones making a few bucks. It is to the point where I think the village should get some money out of this or forget it."

Many communities, including Port Washington, do not permit the retail sale of fireworks, the chief said.

Schultz said he did not think banning fireworks sale would put a damper on Independence Day festivities.

"People in Saukville are going to get fireworks if they want them, regardless of what we do," he said.

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If the village wants to continue allowing the fireworks stands, a \$200 fire inspection fee might be appropriate, said

Trustee Mike Krocka, chairman of the committee.

“I know that’s not too much. I don’t want to make it too easy on them,” Schultz said.

Officials were concerned that banning the sale of fireworks would hurt existing businesses.

Walmart sells other July Fourth novelties, including sparklers.

One way to avoid that, some committee members said, would be to permit sales in existing buildings.

Trustee Dan Sauer asked that a cost study be prepared before considering an outright ban.

“This may bring business into the village, with people deciding to stop at Walmart or whatever,” Sauer said.

Staff was asked to investigate how other communities regulate fireworks sales.