

# Extra police on duty in West Lothian in run up to Bonfire Night

Police in West Lothian today launched the six-day Operation Torsion to tackle anti-social behaviour in the run up to Bonfire Night.

It is backed up by the national police operation which also drafts in extra officers trained to tackle public disorder.

A senior fire officer warned that those bent on causing mayhem would not be deterred by new rules introduced.

There are no Firework Control Zones in West Lothian, but some are being tried in Scottish cities

Asked earlier this week at a meeting of the Armadale and Blackridge Local Area Committee if the new Firework Control Zone legislation would be effective. Station Commander Jim Robertson said: "My own personal view. I hope it proves a positive thing."

But he added: " I think there is unfortunately an element within communities that, regardless of what's in place, will continue to do what they do. At the end of the day it is serious anti-social behaviour.

"It's not just setting off fireworks. It's using fireworks as weapons. It's setting fires to lure emergency services and then attacking them. I don't think that will change. There's

always a certain element that will make it a free for all on the night, and before.”

Mr Robertson said the anti-social behaviour and violence had grown in recent years with fire crews facing increased violence in weeks running up to Bonfire Night rather than just a day or two either side of the events.

He said police and fire crews relied on intelligence from, and the support of, local communities to prevent anti-social behaviour and dangerous fire-setting

Police have already charged a teenager in Blackburn in connection with firework related anti-social behaviour.

A police spokesperson said on Tuesday: “A 14-year-old male from the Blackburn area has been charged with setting off fireworks in the direction of crew from the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service as well as threatening and abusive behaviour towards a member of the public.

“Police Scotland would like to thank members of the Blackburn community for their continued support in these matters.”

At a meeting of the council’s Community Safety Board yesterday councillors heard from both the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland about the work that has already taken place and operational changes planned for the weekend.

Speaking for the fire service Steve Oliver said: “Where resources permit SFRS and Police Scotland will undertake joint patrols on 5 November to reduce demand on operational personnel. The patrols will have direct links into SFRS Control to receive and pass on incident details.”

Both local and national police operations provide extra officers and support for fire crews at what has become one of the busiest and most hazardous times of the year for the emergency services.

For the local police, Partnerships Superintendent Jocelyn Thomson told the Community Safety Board: "We have a policing plan in place Operation Torsion which puts additional resources on duty right through to the fifth who can assist in responding to anti-social behaviour.

"They are backed up by the national Operation Moonbeam and public order officers. So we have them in place right the way through the weekend to provide that additional confidence."

Firework Control Zones which ban all fireworks except for the smallest hand-held sparklers or organised displays in designated areas have not been introduced in West Lothian. Community groups can request them, and information is being prepared for the council's website. The council will consider them for the future.

In Edinburgh control zones have been set up in Balerno, Calton Hill, Niddrie, and Seafield. The zones will be in effect from November 1-10 and setting off fireworks during this time is a criminal offence. The zones were established to: reduce anti-social behaviour, minimise the impact on animals and vulnerable people and also support a cultural shift in how fireworks are used.

The organised firework displays in West Lothian are:-

- Friday 1st Nov West Calder and Harburn CDT Fair 4.30pm, Fireworks at 7pm.
- Tuesday 5th Nov Blackridge, Land at Bedlormie Drive 3pm-9pm
- Tuesday 5th Nov Deer Park Golf and Country Club 6pm Fireworks at 7.30pm
- Tuesday 5th Nov Calderwood Estate, East Calder 6pm-9pm
- Saturday 9th Nov Linlithgow Rugby Club 6.30pm Fireworks at 7.30pm

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter