

Public in West Lothian urged to take steps to ensure safety this bonfire season

Members of the public are being urged to take steps to ensure safety this bonfire season.

Councillors were given a rundown of preparations by the council and emergency services ahead next week.

And as fire fighters prepare for an upsurge in call outs police have warned that those who attack the emergency services will face harsh punishment.

The West Lothian Community Safety Partnership, which includes the council, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and Police Scotland is working with support and assistance from voluntary organisations and members of the public, to promote safety and responsibility this year and also reminding communities what they can do should they encounter suspicious activity.

If you encounter unregistered bonfires that are already alight please contact the SFRS on 999.

Illegal or any other suspicious activity can be reported to Police Scotland by calling 101 or alternatively contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

Area Commander Ross Robison, SFRS Local Senior Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian said: "Bonfire Night is one of the busiest times of the year for our crews.

“Scotland’s Fire and Rescue Crews attend up to 4 times more incidents than usual on the 5th of November, valuable time and resources can be wasted attending unsafe bonfires.

“Last year in the weeks leading up to Bonfire Night, from 14 October through to the 7 November, crews attended more than 600 deliberate fires across Scotland, including bonfires, bin fires and grass fires.

“The safest way to enjoy bonfire night is at an organised event, if you do intend to use fireworks at home ensure that you know how to use them safely and always follow the Firework Code.

“Fire and Rescue crews will work with community partners to keep the public safe during the bonfire period. We have a zero-tolerance approach to deliberate fire setting which can put properties and lives at risk, and any violence towards crews and community partners will absolutely not be tolerated.”

Inspector John Fleming, deputy Local Area Commander for the police in West Lothian said: “Bonfire Night and the preceding and days following are typically one of the busiest periods for officers in West Lothian and we will have dedicated resources in place who will be on patrol throughout the region to offer reassurance to the public, deter criminal activity and provide assistance to our Community Safety partners, if required.

“Local officers will once again be supported by colleagues from national and specialist departments, and we are grateful for this additional resource to call upon.

“It is a criminal offence to buy fireworks for anyone under the age of 18 and if you do so, you could face a £5,000 fine, six months imprisonment, or both, so please don’t risk it. A new aggravator will also be added to charges brought against those who attack emergency service workers.

“We want everyone to enjoy Bonfire Night safely and responsibly and while we are working alongside partners to do all we can to mitigate against fireworks-related disorder, we would also ask for parents and guardians to have frank conversations with young people in their care about the risks and consequences of getting involved in criminality involving fireworks.”

While they can be put in place thanks to new legislation, there will be no firework control zones in place for the up-and-coming 2024 Bonfire season in West Lothian.

Craig Meek, the Executive councillor for community safety, commented: “Discussions with West Lothian Community Safety Partners concluded that there is no evidence to support a Council promoted control zone at this time. “

Speaking at a meeting of the Public and Community Safety Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Maria MacAulay said: “ I just want to say this is a really good report. The work that goes in from all organisations is massive, not something that’s done overnight so well done. I would like to see some more community involvement to look at firework control zones.”

Councillor Alison Adamson welcomed the work the SFRS does with schools but worried that it was mainly older teenagers who caused issues with fireworks.

She asked: “What kind of society sells explosives to people in the name of entertainment. For a lot of people, who have animals or small children, the elderly or people who have PTSD it’s a frightening time How can we police the anti-social element, we don’t have enough people.”

She urged people to support organised displays rather than buy fireworks.

A council spokesperson added: “The partnership continues to

use all current preventative measures in an educative and informative way by sharing collective safety messages and promoting licensed events to all residents and businesses to help keep communities safe. The position will continue to be monitored. We would urge everyone to enjoy the period in a safe and considerate manner.”

To reduce the risk of unnecessary bin fires, residents are asked where possible to put their bins out as early as they can on uplift day and bring them in as soon as they've been emptied.

If you have concerns about the potential illegal sale of fireworks, please get in touch with West Lothian Council's Trading Standards service.

If you suspect an illegal bonfire may be under construction or come across materials suspected of being used for bonfire purposes, get in touch with the council's NETS and Land Services team.

Get in touch with Trading Standards and NETS and Land Services by calling the council's customer service centre on 01506 280000.

For more advice and for information on organised fireworks displays near you, please visit the West Lothian Council website: www.westlothian.gov.uk/bonfire

Firework displays:-

Friday, 1st November: West Calder and Harburn CDT Fair, West Calder. 4:30pm, Fireworks at 7pm.

Tuesday, 5th November: Bedlormie Drive, Blackridge, 3pm to 9pm.

Tuesday, 5th November: Deer Park Golf and Country Club 6pm. Fireworks at 7.30pm.

Tuesday 5th November: Calderwood Estate, East Calder. 6pm to 9pm

Saturday, 9th November: Linlithgow Rugby Club, 6.30pm
Fireworks at 7.30pm

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter