

Dear Mayor and City Commissioners:

Raton has rightly been praised for the city's beautiful fireworks displays for many years. When it comes to fireworks, however, the times are changing. Although the focus of this letter is on private use of fireworks, places like Angel Fire and Taos have converted their official displays to drones and/or laser lights, out of concern for fire danger and noise impacts on pets.

Here in Raton, after enduring another tortuous Fourth of July fireworks “season,” the Raton Humane Society would like to express its dismay about the impact of private fireworks on pets and people alike. From our perspective, the private fireworks situation is out of control in our town--and only getting worse as the years go by. We feel the actions of a few are distressing the majority of residents and their animals.

RHS members are frustrated that individuals are allowed to begin shooting off fireworks as early as June 20. Meanwhile, private fireworks are supposed to end on July 6. Yet as of July 22, 2023, private fireworks were still being heard in the community, in violation of the city’s fireworks ordinance. Also, those discharging private fireworks disregard the legal hours of 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.—often setting them off into the early morning hours.

Dogs, cats and other domestic animals are traumatized by the sounds of a virtual war zone, trembling, hiding, or trying to escape their yards. This does not even take into account local military veterans suffering from PTSD. Pet owners who try to take their animals out of town for a day or two are stymied because of the long time period for private fireworks.

In addition, there is concern that many of the loudest fireworks are illegal items, purchased on the black market out of the trunks of people’s cars. Also, the city ordinance specifies that “no one shall discharge fireworks within 100 feet of combustible vegetation.” Fireworks could be heard being discharged on Goat Hill, where there is plenty of combustible vegetation. Considering the increasing wildfire danger in our region, such rules should be enforced to protect our community.

We believe this situation is hurting the image and reputation of the city for residents and visitors alike.

We call on you to shorten the period for discharging private fireworks, perhaps July 1-6. This would allow residents a few days before and after the Fourth to celebrate. We also call for stricter enforcement of the fireworks ordinance, to include penalties. It appears that mere warnings have little effect.

Sincerely,

*Patricia Walsh*