



**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

Held on Wednesday March 15, 2017

[10:32 a.m. to 12:18 p.m.]

Inquiry: An inquiry into the adverse health effects of fireworks

Objectives of the inquiry

The objectives of the inquiry are:

- 1. To understand the possible impact of fireworks on human health and the extent of injuries associated with the improper use of fireworks;**
- 2. To assess the adequacy of law enforcement measures in place to regulate the use of fireworks and explosives by members of the public.**
- 3. To assess the adequacy of the legal framework governing the use of fireworks and explosives by members of the public.**

Venue: The J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee members

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP – Vice-Chairman
3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP

5. Mr. Rohan Sinanan, Member
6. Ms. Khadijah Ameen, Member

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the Ministry of National Security, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Ministry of Health appeared before the Committee:

Ministry of National Security

- i. Ms. Lydia Jacobs – Permanent Secretary
- ii. Ms. Michelle Pierre Chase – Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- iii. Mr. Kenny Gopaul – Chief Fire Officer (Ag.)
- iv. Mr. Narace Rampersad – Assistant Divisional Officer
- v. Ms. Adelle Rahamut – Senior Legal Officer

Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS)

- i. Mr. Deodat Dulalchan – Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations (Ag.)
- ii. Mr. Kazim Ali – Legal Officer

Ministry of Health

- i. Mr. Richard Madray – Permanent Secretary
- ii. Dr. Roshan Parasram – Chief Medical Officer
- iii. Dr. Robin Sinanan – Head, Accident and Emergency, SWRHA
- iv. Dr. Neal Hinds – Head, Accident and Emergency, NWRHA

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Ministry of National Security

- i. The inadequacy and the need for amendments to be made to the current legislative framework which governs the importation, selling and use of fireworks;

- ii. Lack of data on the number of licences granted and issued before 2014. Furthermore, it was indicated that the last recorded licence was issued in 2014;
- iii. Since 2011, one (1) out of the three (3) main importers of fireworks has not been in compliance with the law as it concerns the storage of fireworks/explosives at a retail storage facility;
- iv. The fact that an importer who has not complied with the law was able to secure a licence to import;
- v. The absence of a distinction between fireworks displays managed by state agencies and use of fireworks by the public;
- vi. Lack of investigations into retail sellers of fireworks;
- vii. Non-compliance of retailers and wholesalers with policies governing the quantity of explosives/fireworks on premises. Currently, the Explosives (Manufacture of Fireworks) Order 1950 states the quantity of explosives on premises shall not exceed 50 pounds of any explosive other than manufactured fireworks and 175 pounds of manufactured fireworks, either finished or partly finished;
- viii. The need for amendments to be made to the related legislation with a view to vesting the TTFS with the authority/jurisdiction over all areas/facilities where fireworks are stored and also the import specifications pertaining to fireworks;
- ix. Lack of due diligence in conducting investigations into outlets selling fireworks, to ensure compliance with the legislation;
- x. Licences issued do not have a stipulated amount of fireworks that is permitted to be imported;
- xi. Lack of data on the total amount of fireworks imported by wholesalers;
- xii. The need for investigations into the shelf-life of fireworks currently stored in the country;
and
- xiii. No stipulated age limit in place for the use of fireworks.

Issues discussed with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service

- i. Over the past five (5) years, five (5) persons (of whom four (4) were charged with selling without a licence) were arrested and charged with the improper use of fireworks. They were fined four hundred dollars (\$400);
- ii. The need for an increase in the penalties for improper use of fireworks and selling without a licence;
- iii. The challenges faced in recording/investigating reports made to the TTPS in reference to the improper use and disturbances caused by the use of fireworks in communities;
- iv. The need for legislative modification to further regulate public use of fireworks. At present, the legislative framework allows the discharge and use of fireworks by the public outside the listed banned areas (towns). The use of fireworks in any town without a licence is prohibited; and
- v. The need for an increase in police presence and visibility in areas where there are high level of disturbances caused by fireworks.

Issues discussed with the Ministry of Health

- i. The injuries associated with the improper use of fireworks are as follows:
 - Burns to skin, eyes and hands;
 - Amputations; and
 - Hearing loss.
- ii. There were nineteen (19) recorded severe injuries as a result of improper use of fireworks that were not reported to the TTFS;
- iii. Eleven (11) reported cases of serious injuries in 2015 at the San Fernando General Hospital (SFGH);
- iv. No system in place to record firework related injuries at hospitals and medical institutions;
- v. Scratch-bombs account for the majority of recorded firework related inquiries;
- vi. Lack of data on adverse health effects such as asthma and respiratory issues associated with the use of fireworks;

- vii. The youngest person recorded with serious injuries as a result of improper use of fireworks was 3 years old; and
- viii. The need for greater collaboration between the MoH and MoNS with reference to addressing the effects of improper use of fireworks on animals and elderly persons.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. Greater community police presence and visibility in areas where there are high occurrences of fireworks related disturbances. This will serve as a deterrence to persons engaging in improper use of fireworks;
- ii. Review of legislative framework with reference to the granting and issuance of wholesale licences;
- iii. Restrict or ban the use of scratch-bombs;
- iv. Conduct studies into cases of children with reported fireworks related injuries;
- v. Research should be conducted at all health facilities with reference to the health effects associated with the use of fireworks;
- vi. Conduct research to assist in the enforcement of the current legislation;
- vii. Engage the Regional Co-operations to obtain assistance in regulating the discharge and use of fireworks within communities;
- viii. Increase the fines associated with conducting sales without a licence and the improper use of fireworks;
- ix. Persons purchasing a particular amount of fireworks from retailers should apply for and present a licence when purchasing;
- x. Greater collaboration between the Trinidad and Tobago Police and Fire Services, Customs and Excise Division, EMA, Ministry of Health, Regional Corporations, the Ministry of National Security and ODPM in order to effectively regulate the use of fireworks;

- xi. That the non-compliant importer be denied future licences until shortcomings at the relevant facility are rectified;
- xii. That there should be a hold on future importation of fireworks by wholesalers, pending an appropriate investigation into the current inventory of fireworks in the country is conducted and proper regulations are enacted place to monitor and regulate the use of fireworks;
- xiii. That medical specialists be consulted on the adverse health effects of fireworks on the geriatric community;
- xiv. Investigations into the sale and storage of expired fireworks be conducted;
- xv. That an area within a community be designated for the discharge and display of fireworks. By doing this, the use of fireworks can be monitored and controlled;
- xvi. That fireworks display and use be prohibited in areas proximate to the international airport;
- xvii. That a stipulated age limit be enforced for the use of fireworks;
- xviii. That a stipulated amount of fireworks be sold to a household;
- xix. That all persons handling fireworks be mandated to obtain a licence from the Magistrate Court; and
- xx. That persons be trained in the appropriate use and discharge of fireworks.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImOO_LVoPVc

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

March 17th, 2017