

Are You Serious? – What every Pyro needs to know to survive.

The internet is a great thing. For those of you on the PGI Mailing list, PML or other active chat boards, it gives us a chance to instantly exchange views, recipes, pyro (and life-based) information and argue (a lot) about our many differing views on pyro (and life) in general. If you are on one or more of these lists, you also know by the more disturbing 'news items' that we do not live in an equally pyro-friendly world. The Pyrotechnic Arts have been around for about 5,000 or 6,000 years but in all that time, there has never been as great a threat posed it by so many converging forces as now.

There are numerous wrong-headed, devoid of common sense and mostly ignorant-of-pyro-fact based groups out there who are clamoring for its complete and utter ban. Some, want only professional displays (and very few of them at that), no 1.4G private sales allowed and everything imaginable in between those two views.

Then we have our buddies at the CPSC. They claim they don't want to get rid of pyro altogether, "just" the chemicals and materials we use to make them (?) – Whatever.

There's the "save ourselves from ourselves" aka "Super-Nanny" groups who want government to legislate every facet of everything we do or buy so we don't hurt ourselves (ain't that nice of them!).

Another big one is local authorities at the City and County level. You are all no doubt aware of the water-quality debacles happening at numerous locations around the country.

Last but certainly NOT least is the threat from overzealous lawmakers wishing to impress their constituents by passing the ever-popular "anti-terrorism, homeland security-type" laws in order that we "desperado terrorist pyros" don't take a display shell and "level a major city" with it – for anyone out there that doesn't get it, that's a joke – BTW.

So what does this convergence of threats mean to you and me? Your answer to that depends on you and you alone. You must decide how your pyro activities benefit you. How much do you love it? Are you the type that feels goose bumps going up and down your arms when a particularly beautiful shell goes off (no matter the size)? Do you feel giddy during a great finale at a show? Have you ever gone behind your spouse's back and held back a few bucks from your paycheck to sneak just a few more things into your 4th of July show? (Honest Honey, I only used that as an example!)

If none of these apply to you, you might not care if we as a group go the way of the Dodo. BUT, if I have come even close to describing some of what you feel about our hobby, then you NEED to get involved in this fight – TODAY.

In order to understand what we are up against and so everyone understands the ramifications of and gains due respect for the attack our hobby is undergoing, I would like to summarize briefly what happened recently to the laws in Illinois and why we are using that set of laws as a guideline for what WE DO NOT WANT to see ANYWHERE!

To shoot a show in Illinois now, a shooter must have a state issued license – two of them in fact. To obtain these licenses, the shooter must take a class and pass a test offered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in conjunction with the State Fire Marshal's Office AND another class AND another test through Illinois Department of Mines and Minerals for an Individual Explosives License.

The various costs to the shooter (unless a vendor picks up the tab) is \$ 44.00 for filing the fingerprint card from the State Police used for the background check for Individual Explosives License through Mines and Minerals (plus whatever your local law enforcement charges to print you) AND another \$44.00 for the filing a duplicate of the same fingerprint card from the State Police (yes, again) for yet another background check for the SFM Office Display Operator License (if you have both cards filled out at the same time, your local law enforcement might cut you some slack on the fingerprinting fee which generally runs from nothing to \$40 bucks or more – but no bets), plus a \$25.00 per license fee (down from the original \$100.00 by order of the Illinois Attorney General which was deemed exorbitant) from the SFM Office for the Shooters License and another 75.00 from the DNR for their mandatory Individual Explosives License. Other costs include time-off from work, classroom and travel expenses.

But wait, there's more! This shooters license is 'tied' directly to a specific vendor who is licensed by the State of Illinois (for a \$500.00 vendor license fee). If you shoot for more than one vendor, you get to go after another license which is 'tied' to that second vendor. To shoot a show, ALL shooters must be covered under Illinois Workman's Compensation Insurance (in other words they MUST be an EMPLOYEE OF A COMPANY) and all 1.3G shows must be covered by a minimum 2 million dollar aggregate policy or 'only' \$1,000,000.00 for a 1.4G show. Gosh – what a great deal!

Even Municipalities who want to put on their own 4th of July show once each year MUST obtain the \$500.00 Licensed Illinois Vendor License and have their Shooter's licenses tied to it, provide workman's comp and meet minimum show insurance requirements to do so.

As you can guess, this has put some of the small vendors, smaller budget private shows and some small town shows out and had a devastatingly chilling effect on all individual shooters. Upon enactment of the law there, some of the small vendors were put out of business (that day).

There is not now and nor is there likely to ever be any club activity in Illinois because of these excessive and restrictive laws. Private 1.3G shows are forbidden – period. ONLY a licensed Illinois Vendor who can provide Workman's Comp and FULL-TIME Insurance policy (not day-of-shoot insurance) are allowed now by law to shoot 1.3G shows there.

So - why would anyone support changes that would result in this? The people proposing them claimed, that these changes would "make us safer" but the ones doing the actual lobbying for them obviously did this for simplest reasons on earth – money, greed and power. Despite the distinct lack of any factual evidence to support the claim and despite any rationale from which such a claim could even theoretically be supported, the claim made by some of these folks is that somehow, we hobbyists cut into their profits.

Because of this belief, they feel that we (the hobbyists, clubs and small vendors alike) must go. According to one source, a stated intention is to see that the "starting point" for a fireworks show falls between 8 and 10 thousand dollars in any given state they control. Seeing red yet? You should be.

Since the Illinois law was drafted as "Emergency Legislation" (despite the fact that Illinois had been developing them for more than three years), there was almost NO debate, NO opportunity for public opinion or oversight of any kind. It was introduced and voted on basically in the same breath and like almost all laws passed under the guise of "Homeland Security" to "protect" the public, it was instantly and overwhelmingly passed.

The benefit to the largest vendors was instant and obvious but there is also a downside to what they got as well. Obviously, they had to pick up much of the cost to get their shooters licensed so their cost of doing business went up and had to be covered. Due to the increased costs, either shows will have to be "slimmer" (less product in them) or their prices will have to rise to cover these extra costs.

Some casual shooters simply quit which left a shortage of shooters there. Some smaller budgets and mandatory 'vendor licenses' even to towns who used to have their firefighters do a fourth of July show caused some to drop shows altogether. This of course affects the 'bottom-line' of the vendors which in turn will force them to further increase prices down the road or lose revenue, cut employees, lose more shows, etc. etc. etc.

Since then, there has been time for retrospection. Some of the people who originally thought these were good things to lobby for were not deeply involved in the actual stumping process which brought about the new laws. They did not foresee the ultimate results these laws would produce until they went into effect. Some of the ones most closely involved have since expressed deep regret and much concern for what went down there in Illinois and some of them are now working with the hobbyist community to affect positive, pyro-friendly laws in other states.

The law in Illinois will likely remain in place unless challenged in court or a huge lobbying campaign is mounted by someone with lots of time and money to throw at it. This sadly is not likely to happen anytime soon. The best we can hope for now and act preemptively to do is what we are attempting to do now, namely get pyro friendly laws passed in all other states looking to 'upgrade' their laws which serve the dual purposes of both Pyro and Vendor to the benefit of both. This is a struggle for the very existence of the hobby and industry we all love. It's that simple.

There are currently at least two other states where these same people are actively lobbying for a copy of the Illinois laws to be enacted. So the question becomes, now that we know what happened in this case and why, what do we do about it besides get hopping mad?

What YOU can do about it:

---- JOIN THE FIREWORKS ALLIANCE

ANYONE who has NOT joined the Fireworks Alliance for whatever reason either needs to join today or start looking at another hobby (I hear underwater basket weaving is hot right now).

Next – Get ALL of your family members, co-workers and friends to join the ALLIANCE!

It is free and they don't have to be a pyro, just concerned and friendly towards it.

Be a pain in the butt until they give in!

They don't even have to fill out the form if they give you permission (even verbally) to do it for them.

This will give us the voice we need to talk to "number deaf" politicians.

Then - CALL your Lawmakers.

Make sure they know what NOT to do in order to secure your vote next time around. Their single biggest ploy (to insure shooter 'safety') is to get Workman's Comp Insurance mandated for all shooters on all shows.

If this one single provision is enacted, it is game over. NO club or individual hobbyist can EVER qualify for Workman's Comp coverage because they are not in commerce and never will be.

- One simple slice of the regulatory knife, a little twist and you're done.

Getting mandatory full-time insurance coverage enacted is another devastating ploy they use. Since the "danger" is only present for the day of any given show, common sense proves full-time insurance to be no better than the umbrella coverage you can buy from vendors as day-of-show coverage. However, because this IS common sense, and obviously simple, this point needs to be pounded into the heads of our lawmakers. This provision is anti-hobbyist, anti small-business and anti fair-competition. All it can and will ever do is drive the little guys out, increase the cost of displays and take the so-called competition out of the big vendor's way.

---- WRITE your Lawmakers AND your local Newspapers.

Be VOCAL! No one will know what is going on if you don't yell it from the rooftops.

---- JOIN A CLUB (or START ONE!)

If you are fortunate enough to have a hobby club near you (or better yet more than one), JOIN IT/THEM!
Add your voice to its membership before there are none left. We now have, some pyros from Illinois who have no clubs coming over to Iowa as members of the Iowa Pyrotechnic Association and/or the Stumptown Shooters.

We welcome them all with open arms because we are all in the same boat. We will either sail off into the sunset or sink to the bottom with it. There is NO in between here. It's all or nothing from here on out.

---- GO TO MEETINGS!

Be heard! If you are near an area where groundwater contamination scares have popped up, this needs to be addressed and stopped. We must educate the ignorant by explaining why out of all of the possible sources for this type of ground water contamination that fireworks are absolutely at the very dead-bang bottom of the list as the likely suspect.

Among many other facts, there is the most often overlooked fact that the supposed 'contaminant' BURNS UP almost completely when a shell goes off. Couple this with the relatively small amounts of these supposed contaminants contained in a given shell and it's very inconvenient to those trying to sustain a valid argument against fireworks.

---- DONATE!

Turn out the donations for the Fireworks Foundation. This is OUR lobbying effort to counter that of those who want us gone. The Foundation is at the front-line in the fight and the ammo is money.

Pass the hat at ALL of your shows and be persistent about it. Hobbyists, Clubs and private individuals should all give what they can as often as they can if you deem your hobby to be worth saving.

---- LASTLY,

A quick point or two to the Vendors and Display company owners out there, think (seriously) about donating a portion of your profits on all sales and shows to the Fireworks Foundation.

You don't like the idea of some of your money being used to potentially help one of your competitors?

Do you like the idea of 'them' coming after you after they dispense with all the rest of your competitors instead?

Being the last one standing has little meaning when you meet the same fate as the other 'losers', it just means you are the 'last loser' - not the 'winner'.

Your customers are far more likely to remain customers if they know you are behind them in this effort.

If you are a vendor or a supplier, think of what your life would be like (and your bottom line) if you lost a majority of your shooters, your costs rose significantly and all of your hobbyist sales, all of your private (box sale) shows and a portion of your small municipal shows were to just disappear (POOF) at the exact moment your State's brand new anti-fireworks laws go into effect.

Won't happen, you say?

Guess again.

It already has happened and will again if you don't think the hobbyist is worth fighting for.