

## **FIREWORKS SECURITY ALERT**

Every year, police departments nationwide report a surge of robberies and thefts from fireworks stores, purveyors and vendors.

Many roadside stands and firework stores are often situated in outlying areas of major cities where there are no restrictions on their sale and where law enforcement may have a longer response, in the event of trouble or emergencies.

Thieves will see these operations as soft targets. Stealing products for easy sale in anticipation of July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend and other celebrations that customarily use fireworks.

Thieves will also be making their rounds looking for soft targets, with little or no security around crowded tents and stores with product that is easy to procure. Armed robbers following the money will be attracted to many of these locations and will likely stop at nothing to take what they want.

“In Goddard, Kansas last year armed men hit a group selling fireworks twice in three days and held a security officer at gunpoint at a roadside tent in the overnight hours as they loaded up a black Cadillac Escalade,” according to Goddard Police. Police acknowledge the security officer approached the car and told the men the store was closed. That is when they pulled their guns and stole the products.

One man held the guard at gunpoint while another started loading fireworks into the truck. In many of these robberies the cash is left behind.

It's not unusual for thieves to score more than \$10,000 in fireworks.

In the predawn hours of July 4 last year, robbers got into an all out shootout with a security officer in Texas and in 2011 in Omaha Nebraska teens armed with handguns robbed a fireworks stand of more than \$5000 worth of fireworks in a 20 minute spree and threatened to kill the unarmed security guard.

In 2010 a security officer was ambushed, kidnapped and beaten during a robbery of a fireworks stand in Gallup New Mexico.

Two security officers have also been killed in recent years during firework stand robberies. One security officer in Garden Grove California was stabbed to death during a theft and a security officer in Louisiana was shot to death. Police warn all fireworks stands to be vigilant and arrange for precautions. Officers are advised that in the event of a serious altercation, no amount of property is worth risking lives for.

While many would assume that fireworks would be an unlikely target, the Los Angeles sheriff's department robbery task force believes that it would be the wrong and possibly deadly assumption for a storekeeper to make. Stolen fireworks are easily sold for cash and carry premium prices and often are hard to trace.

Security officers on duty at these locations should be well trained, alert at all times, be situationally aware and prepared and have access to either two way radios or cellular phones for immediate communications. Contingency planning is de-rigor.

Security agencies should also make these assignments a priority in spot checking their employees especially in the overnight hours. Don't underestimate the dangers or the risk that may accompany late night customers and visitors.

Risks for inside jobs coordinated with outside accomplices, and other inside theft arises significantly around Independence Day.

\*\* Excerpts derived from Private Officer International

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