

Education and Outreach Regarding Carmel Beach Fire Pilot Program
Report to Carmel By The Sea City Staff on Community Input
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April 4, 2015

BACKGROUND

This report contains a synopsis of the comments and suggestions of various community groups and residents about how to educate the community and beach users about the upcoming beach fire pilot program. Those interviewed for this report include representatives of the following organizations: The Carmel Chamber of Commerce, The Carmel Residents Association, the Carmel High School Environmental Club, Sustainable Carmel, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control Board, and the Forest and Beach Commission. Also interviewed were the Carmel police officer who trains the beach security officer, the security officer who patrols the beach to educate about the beach rules, the City marketing and public information consultants, a City Special Projects manager, and one member of the City Council. The recommendations below are a distillation of comments and suggestions obtained from these interviews, supplemented with additional research. Some of these suggestions have already been included in City staff plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Before Coming To The Beach

1. Online information

Remove from City and City-related websites (like CarmelCalifornia.com and Monterey Visitors and Convention Bureau) all current mention of or inducements to travel to Carmel to have a fire on the beach. This would include websites that tourists would consult about Carmel activities. Removal of this information will eliminate expectations that unlimited fires are still allowed.

Non-Carmel websites that would need to be changed include:

<http://www.beachcalifornia.com/beach/carmel-beach-information.html>

<http://www.californiabeaches.com/beach/carmel-city-beach/>

http://gocalifornia.about.com/od/camontereycarmel/p/beach_carmel.htm

Inquire about the source of the very large photograph on the hallway leading to baggage claim at the Monterey Airport. This tourist photograph shows a couple in front of a beach fire built on the sand. If possible, this photograph should be removed since it misleadingly indicates that this is still allowed.

2. Who to Notify About the Pending Change in Beach Fire Rules

It is advisable to provide advance notification to anyone likely to come to Carmel Beach intending to build a fire. While there is no data on who these people are, people who frequent the beach report that those who come to build a fire are mostly local and regional residents, regional being areas within a 2 hour drive from Carmel. Tourists who come from farther away are inclined to want a beach fire if informed in advance via online searches (see above) or from various sources after they arrive. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider the following:

- Notice placed on the City website and Facebook page
- Press releases sent to newspapers and other media outlets in these areas
- Emails to schools in these areas, since students frequently use the beach for parties with fires. Include the military schools and local colleges.
- Emails to local tourist information sources
- Email notices to community organizations such as the Chamber, CRA, Carmel Foundation, Carmel Women's Club, Innkeepers Association, Carmel Youth Center, Kiwanis/Rotary and other similar civic groups, local churches (at least one of which holds ceremonial fires on the beach), Surfriders, etc.
- Flyers placed in hotel rooms, the tourist information office, etc.
- Flyers that can be attached to wood that is sold at the local grocery stores

NOTE: In the process of these interviews, it became apparent that the City has no uniformly effective way to notify the public of important information and changes. Despite the numerous public meetings about beach fires, for instance, citizens still complained that they were unaware of the City's intended plans. If this remains the case with the new beach fire rules, the project will create unhappy situations on the beach and complaints to the City. It appears that the traditional method of submitting notices to the newspaper has become less effective and, unless people are on alert about a particular issue, they are generally not inclined to seek information from the City website or Facebook page. Given that these are all forms of "pull" notices where citizens must actively seek information, the City may want to consider a "push" notice system such as an email blast to those who sign up to receive them. A system such as this can be used for any important information that the City wants to distribute to the community.

On The Beach

1. Signage—to notify people walking down to the beach and to minimize complaints about view obstruction or sign proliferation, place signs about the rules halfway down the steps, perhaps on the railings or at the water stations. Such signs will be difficult to miss by those walking down to the beach. They can be constructed so that the wording can be changed as the City adapts the rules or the rules change with the season (as they will in the winter when the fire pits will be removed).

2. Attach the rules to each fire pit. These rules should state what cannot be burned in these pits.¹ The signs can suggest that fire pit users share their fire with others when all of the pits are taken.

3. Maintain the security officer patrol since these officers are effective and friendly educators about the beach rules. When the officer encounters a group that is unaware of the beach rules (such as DLI, MIIS, etc), ask if they would post the rules somewhere on the website of their institution. Also, the patrol officer can take note of when the fire pits are all in use and inform people coming down to the beach with wood that there are no more pits available.

4. Mark the 10th street steps on the top and bottom since many people cannot locate them and are thus prone to build fires north of 10th. Note: on the evening when Maggie Eaton accompanied the security officer on his patrol, there were 8 fires north of 10th and two more that were being built. All of the people at these fires were unaware of the location of the 10th Street steps.

What to Say

Explain why the pilot project is being conducted—to prevent environmental damage to the beach and reduce air pollution from an excessive number of fires. Generally, once informed about the reason for the rule changes, people are more inclined to accept them. Also, since beach and beach fire users leave too much trash on the beach, include the message to “pack out what you pack in”. Also, refrain from using the term “bonfire” since it implies that large fires are acceptable. Encourage people to try gas-fueled fire containers. Use language to encourage people to enjoy the beach in its natural state. Finally, consider linking any online or email messages about the program to sources of information about the hazards of exposure to wood smoke. Authoritative sources include:

- The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control Board
- The California EPA Air Resources Board’s Wood Burning Handbook
http://www.arb.ca.gov/research/indoor/wood_burning_handbook.pdf
- The American Lung Association

¹ According to the Monterey Bay Air Pollution Control District, Carmel is located in a Class 1 Air Shed, meaning that it is a smoke sensitive area. Under the outdoor burning rules, natural wood can be burned and the District Manager reported that dry wood reasonably free of surface moisture and dirt is the least polluting. Do not burn driftwood since it has been previously soaked in sea water and, when burned, releases toxic dioxin. Burning trash, treated wood, pellets, or painted wood is prohibited. Duraflame logs are also polluting since they are impregnated with wax and other binders.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS (not all related to outreach and education)

1. Security officers who patrol the beach can ask people where they are from. This will give the City a better sense of where further outreach and education should be directed.
2. People using the beach often dig pits into the sand even if the pit is not for a fire. Too often, these pits are left as is and other beach users can fall into them (as has the security officer who patrols the beach). This is a hazard not only at night but also during the day when those playing or running on the beach do not see the pits. Since the security officers also serve a public safety role, they can approach people digging pits into the sand and ask the diggers to fill in the pits before they leave.
3. Patrolling the beach exposes the security officer to the hazards of wood smoke pollution. He spends 8-10 hours every weekend on the beach inhaling deeply as he trudges through the sand. Mitigation of the health risk to these officers should be considered.
4. Other safety risks noticed include: children aged 14 years and younger building and tending beach fires with no adult present, frequent use of liquid fire starters, and tiki torches.
5. Consider contacting the local realtors about the issue of smoke pollution from beach fires and encouraging them to assist with the efforts to reduce the hazard to homeowners in the beach "smoke zone". California law requires home sellers to disclose "known material facts that affect the value or desirability of the property" which would include weekend exposure to wood smoke from beach fires. Since the existence of such environmental hazards tends to reduce the value of a home, realtors may be inclined to help.
6. Since the City will be allowing more fires on heavy use days and since students are frequent users of the beach, consider including them in the days where more fires will be allowed. For instance, the Carmel High School students would love to be allowed to have a fire or fires on the day after the Shoe Game. A special permit might be issued in exchange for assurances by a named individual that the beach rules will be obeyed and all trash removed.