

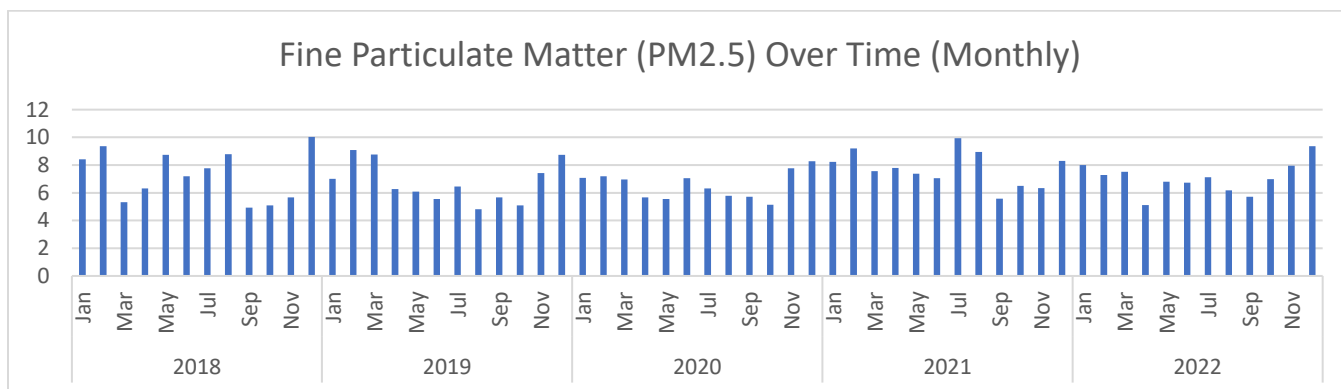
Report to support our plea to keep backyard fireworks – Aug 22, 2023

Honourable Mayor Morgan and Members of City Council:

Namaste! This report has been prepared to provide objective data and support for our position as a community to preserve backyard fireworks. The Hindu Legacy group is an umbrella organization representing over 10 local Hindu Groups. Together these organizations represent over 10,000 London Hindus. This issue affects the community deeply and **we are completely in support of Option A**.

During the Public Participation Meeting (PPM), we heard several claims to support the ban on backyard fireworks (i.e., Option B). We would like to address each one of them below:

Air Pollution: We used the data from Ontario’s Ministry of Environment (<https://www.airqualityontario.com/history/>). The range of data is from 1/1/18 to 12/31/22 (5 years). We used the Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) as the variable of choice to measure pollution and AQI degradation. The chart below shows the monthly average over the entire period varies but never exceeds 10. According to the California Air Resources Board (<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/>), any value **below 12** is considered very good quality air. Therefore, based on these findings, there is **no statistical proof** that backyard fireworks, or for that matter, commercial fireworks contribute to AQI degradation. We would also like to bring to your attention to the months of October and November (typical months for Diwali), the PM2.5 indicator is near its lowest level!



Noise Pollution: There is no published objective data available for our city regarding this. Whatever was found on the internet was for areas that are outside our city or even country. Therefore, other than anecdotal data, there is no evidence to support a statement that backyard fireworks are a significant contributor to noise pollution in the city! In fact, we found various articles about how **leaf blowers** that are widely used in the Fall and Summer contribute to noise pollution and worsen anxiety in people and animals. Please refer to the CBC article - <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/leaf-blowers-london-ontario-1.6020949>. We are also working with the London Police Service to gather noise complaint data which will submit at a later date.

PTSD: We are very empathetic to the stress and trauma that PTSD patients experience and in no way are we minimizing their plight. However, we would like to refer to the letter submitted by a group of psychiatrists regarding PTSD and the impact of fireworks (Dr. Varapavan et al). As is shared, it is their professional opinion that choosing Option B will not solve the problem and there seems to be no conclusive evidence that backyard fireworks worsen PTSD.

Effect on Pets and Other Animals: As Hindus, we consider ALL life sacred, not just human life. Many Hindu families have dogs, cats, and other animals as pets. We have attached a letter from Dr. Hanif who is a well-established Veterinarian that shows that in his many decades of experience, he has not dealt with a problem of traumatized pets after days where fireworks are discharged. We also have a written affidavit from Hindu families that attest to having no issues with their pets during Diwali, Canada Day, or Victoria Day. However, we also recognize that startling and confusing blasts can be frightening for some animals. We are making every effort to educate our community (peta.org) on preparing their home and animal companions for such events by using distraction, soothing techniques, ensuring they are wearing identification tags, etc.

Proactive Efforts for Safe Usage: We are actively working with the Fire Department, the Canadian National Fireworks Association (<https://www.nationalfireworks.ca/>), and local fireworks vendors to ensure safe discharge of backyard fireworks. We will be sending out several “Safe Fireworks” campaigns before Diwali to ensure that our community continues to practice safe fireworks.

The Hindu, Sikh, and Jain Communities: Our communities in London have been here since the ‘60s. We have lived peacefully and have integrated into every part of London society. The Hindu, Sikh, and Jain community has added much to the economic and multicultural landscape of our beautiful city. As a community we feel welcome and respected in London. This community in London is over 10,000 strong (and growing).

Petition, Poll, and Letters: A change.org petition supporting Option A has been signed by **over 1000** London Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains (and counting). A summary is attached with this report. The overwhelming response to your City Poll supporting Option A (53% in just four (4) days) is evidence to this council that the City’s Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains will be personally affected by the ban. You have also received **over 300 letters** from our community regarding this issue.

The city needs to respect our rights to make responsible choices (i.e., safe use of fireworks) and not act punitively. They need to review the available data objectively and not make policy changes based on subjective claims. Enacting a bylaw to ban backyard fireworks will deeply hurt the Hindu, Sikh, and Jain community and **erode an essential and inextricable part of an 800-year-old religious tradition**. We are all aware of the long-term impacts of eroding traditions and cultural practices such as we see in the indigenous population today. The erosion of these age-old customs diminishes the unique identities of our multicultural mosaic. By safeguarding these traditions, we ensure that the tapestry of human heritage remains vibrant, and that the collective wisdom of the past continues to guide us toward a harmonious and inclusive future.

We are positive that the esteemed Council will take the right decision, keeping the Charter of Rights in mind, to practice our religion in a free and peaceful manner. **We urge you to make the right choice and vote in favor of Option A so that you not only support the Hindu community’s religious traditions, but also support ALL Londoners that express their joy during Canada Day, Victoria Day, and Diwali through backyard fireworks!**

Thank you and Namaste!

p.s. Please share this report and attachments as part of the Council agenda for the Aug 29 meeting.