

By law, Chief Gavin had to douse county fair fireworks display

By Charlie Warner

Argus News Editor

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“The fair board went through the proper channels to obtain the permit,” City Administrator Bob Nelson said. “The fire department was asked to be on hand to provide fire protection. When they arrived several hours before the scheduled event, they looked everything over and felt it was a hazardous situation.”

According to Gavin, the fireworks were to be launched on the east end of the fair grounds near the grandstand. The projectiles were to be shot nearly straight up and potentially would be landing very close to a large LP tank, a 500 gallon diesel fuel tank, a 300 gallon gasoline tank, and near a herd of 150 beef cows.

“The permit was issued in June, but we never received any information from the company as to where they were going to launch the fireworks,” Gavin explained. “The code calls for at least 420 feet of clearance,

and they were within 125 feet. We looked at moving the launching area closer to the grandstand, but that wouldn't work either, because then it was too close to the spectators. I even contacted the state fire marshal. I was advised not to sign the papers to let the fireworks display go on as planned.

According to Gavin, either he or Houston County Sheriff Doug Ely had to sign the final approval papers before the event could take place.

Gavin pointed out that the Caledonia Fire Department has always supported the Houston County Fair. Local fire fighters have helped provide fire protection and crowd control for more than 100 years, until the Fair Posse was established a number of years ago.

"I didn't want to deny the permit, but I didn't have any choice," Gavin continued. "The fair board went through the proper channels. It wasn't their fault. The company that was putting the event on has it stated right on their website that they need a 300 foot radius around the launch site. They knew better. They didn't have close to enough room. By law, we couldn't approve it," the fire chief concluded.

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