



Chocolate Bombs

**By Lt. Stephanie Allestad
Grays Harbor Fire District #8**

Chocolate on the Beach Festival

We joke about everything we've had to deal with at the Chocolate on the Beach Festival. We embraced the winter season on the Washington coast with our tagline, "It's Always Raining Chocolate!". We've dealt with the usual sideways rain, microbursts with banners flying off to Japan, Batman in the snow and even a mini Tsunami or two.

When I'm not working on our festival, I'm heavily involved with disaster preparedness for my fire district's jurisdiction and for our county. Opening day of our festival, I had to attend a very serious county meeting by phone. Our Coastal Evacuation Workgroup has been trying to work on getting our county all on the same page. So, when the worst happens, we are all prepared with the same plan. We discovered that day that Communication and Education was something we needed to work on.

On Saturday night of the festival I received a panicky call from an accommodation asking me what the explosions on the beach were? I had heard something, but thought it was someone setting of fireworks, as we get that a lot. My first call was to State Parks as they are the main jurisdiction on the beach. They had received a text explaining the situation. WWII 20mm anti-aircraft high explosive rounds were washing up on our beach. Unstable little bombs, that when detonated shake your houses and buildings.



People were bringing these into crowded bars, accommodations, restaurants, the GYM where the vendors were and driving all over town in their vehicles with their families! Nobody was told about it, until I started making calls and then seeing posts on Facebook. They knew 2 days prior and didn't let anybody know

about it till after they had bomb squads detonating them. No press releases saying, "Hey, don't pick this stuff up on the beach, they can accidentally go off.", no call to State Parks, 9-1-1, fire departments or even tribal. No thought about families with kids out on break or a festival going on.



I wrote an email to several agencies, explaining what I had to deal with as member of my fire department and as an event organizer. I spent over an hour on the phone with my contact at the Sheriff's office. We went over the timeline of events and worked out where communication and education can be used in the future. In the next month, this will be brought up at EVERY meeting we attend.

The good news is, because of my email, they realized there was another event the following weekend...the annual Beachcomber's Fair in Ocean Shores. They contacted the coordinator and gave them information on how to deal with the situation at hand.

What if this was your event? When something like this happens, event organizers need to know what is going on too. Think about how you would have handled the information. How would you get a heads up or warning out? As event organizers we should have a good relationship with our first responders. We need to stop thinking of them as enforcers and start working with them as partners. When something bad happens, it's easier and more efficient to resolve the problem when everyone has the same plan.

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