

Alternative cheaper, better for the air Chamber, fair consider July 4th lasers

By Mike Eiman

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HANFORD — Would the Fourth of July be the same with lasers instead of fireworks?

The Hanford Chamber of Commerce and management for The Kings Fair are weighing their options for this year's Fourth of July celebration.

Mike Bertaina, CEO of the Hanford Chamber of Commerce, said a fireworks show would cost about \$28,000, plus \$1,800 for a sound system and another \$2,000 for insurance. On the other hand, a laser show that resembles a fireworks display costs about \$15,000, and doesn't pollute the air.

Kings County Supervisor Tony Barba has made lasers look even more appealing, Bertaina said,

Barba, who serves on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's governing board, asked the board last month to consider granting money to Fourth of July displays that opt to use lasers in place of fireworks.

Last week the regional board approved a new incentive program to fund alternatives to pyrotechnic firework displays. Valley air pollution typically spikes on July 4 and 5 because of the chemical smoke spewed into the air.

"This is a chance to eliminate some of that pollution," Barba said. "It'll be interesting just to see how it works."

Hanford will receive a \$10,000 grant for making the switch.

Kings Fairgrounds CEO Angie Avila said the grant, along with funds from the Hanford Chamber of Commerce and the Hanford Rotary Club, is already enough to cover the laser show.

Hanford's annual fireworks show has been threatened with cancellation in recent years because of financial constraints.

Although it's cheaper and better for the air, a laser show could pose a number of obstacles. First of all, Avila said, the fairgrounds may not have enough space for the giant screen that's needed to project the lasers.

Also, a typical fireworks display lasts somewhere between 45 minutes and an hour. But lasers would require an added expense of several thousand dollars to pay for some kind of entertainment — dancers, a musical group or a DJ — to accompany the show to make it last.

"You have to do that or else the laser show is over in 20 minutes, 30 minutes if you're lucky," Avila said.

Then there's the biggest problem of all: Will the public be receptive to lasers on Fourth of July? It's something new and exciting, but Avila and Bertaina said they've heard mixed reviews as to whether it will deliver the "oohs" and "ahs" of a traditional fireworks show.

"It sounds like a great idea if we can make it work," Bertaina said. "It looks just like a regular fireworks show but with no pollution. But I'd also like to see it first."

Avila said she and Bertaina should reach a decision by late next week as to whether to shift to lasers or stick with fireworks.

"We want some tradition," she said. "July is fireworks. But in the future you have to try new things."

