

MYTHS about Celebratory Gunfire:

Bullets shot upwards simply vanish into space.

No, we know better now. The bullets do most definitely come back down to Earth and fall on something, -- the ground, a car, a building, or a person.

Celebratory gunfire is harmless.

Firing random bullets may result in death and injury. It is a potentially fatal activity, which regularly results in the deaths of bystanders.

We don't know why.

But we do. Bullets fired at angles less than vertical are more dangerous, as the bullet maintains its angular ballistic trajectory, is far less likely to engage in tumbling motion, and so travels at speeds much higher than a bullet in free fall.¹ Firearms expert Julian Hatcher studied falling bullets in the 1920s and his study showed that .30 calibre rounds can reach terminal velocities of 300 feet per second as they fall.

Injury from random gunfire isn't really serious.

More recent research has indicated that 200 feet per second is enough to penetrate the skull. Examples of fatalities due to celebratory gunfire abound.

A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 80% of celebratory gunfire-related injuries are to the head, feet, and shoulders.^[4]²

Injury from celebratory gunfire is rare.

For those hit by falling bullets, the chance of the wound being fatal was far higher than a typical shooting. The hospital put deaths from regular shootings between 2% and 6%, while for those struck by falling bullets the death rate was close to one third.

The reason is simple – those unlucky enough to be hit by falling shells were more likely to be struck on the head, and while the bullets were travelling slower after being shot into the sky, they were still capable of smashing skulls³.

Doesn't happen anymore though.

It's still happening. Even this year, on January 1, 2015, a 43-year-old man, Javier Suarez Rivera, was struck in his head and killed while watching fireworks with his family in SE Houston.⁴

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebratory_gunfire

² "New Year's Eve Injuries Caused by Celebratory Gunfire --- Puerto Rico, 2003". Retrieved 2007-07-31.

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/24/how-dangerous-is-celebratory-gunfire>

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/02/us-usa-texas-death-idUSKBN0KB1B420150102>

Celebratory gunfire is not illegal.

Recently the careless discharge of a firearm within the city has been elevated from a misdemeanor to a felony in many locales. In California, discharging a firearm into the air is a felony punishable by one year in state prison. Those caught could face jail or prison time if convicted. If a stray bullet from your gun should kill someone, you will be arrested and charged with murder.

Celebratory gunfire is not preventable.

Not so. Strategic policing, community engagement, review & analysis of historical data and gun crime activity, proactive outreach to prior offenders, and visits from uniformed officers – all combined – have absolutely made a marked, measureable difference. When local law enforcement and the community work together and reinforce each other's efforts, unmistakable progress is made.