# A casualty-free New Year

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Once again, many parts of the Philippines are turning into a war zone as Filipinos outdo each other in greeting the New Year with a bang.

But the age-old superstition that sudden bursts of heat, light, and sound from firecracker explosions bring good luck has long been dispelled by scores of people who welcome the first day of the year with more pain than prosperity—due to mangled limbs and other injuries, on top of soaring medical bills.

Days before New Year’s Eve, the Department of Health (DOH) reported 69 firecracker-related injuries, most of them male and under 19 years old. Across 62 monitoring sites, figures showed that most of the injuries involved amputated fingers, burns, and eye damage.

Tonight’s celebration, it is feared, will once again transform hospitals nationwide into centers of blood and chaos, as the annual warnings of government agencies to ditch firecrackers for safer alternatives fall on deaf ears.

## Use other noisemakers

The DOH has long championed other ways to celebrate the coming year, such as using noisemakers like drums or car horns, singing karaoke, or watching community fireworks shows. In the run-up to the holidays, parents are bombarded with messages urging them to keep their children from firecrackers and other explosive hazards. “Do not use firecrackers. Keep children away from danger. Use alternative noisemakers like trumpets or music,” the DOH implored in one such advisory this year.

In 2017, the use of firecrackers and fireworks in residential homes was banned under then President Rodrigo Duterte’s Executive Order No. 28, which also required private companies to secure a permit and the supervision of experts before mounting fireworks displays.

Earlier this month, the Philippine National Police announced a crackdown on the online sale of banned firecrackers, among them, Super Lolo, Atomic Triangle, Large Judas Belt, Large Bawang, Goodbye Philippines, Bin Laden, Mother Rocket, Lolo Thunder, Atomic Bomb, Super Yolanda. Also forbidden are the less explosive but highly toxic “watusi,” which can be fatal when ingested.

According to the PNP, most of the illegal firecrackers contain over one-third of a teaspoon, or more than 0.2 grams, of explosives. Another police guideline requires that the standard fuse of a firecracker must not burn in less than three seconds or more than six seconds.

The threat of fire is ever present in firecrackers as well, prompting the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) to issue its own advisory asking the public to refrain from using them. As of Dec. 24, the BFP had recorded 15 fire incidents related to firecrackers.

## Bill calls for a total ban

In 2022, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian filed Senate Bill No. 1144, or the proposed Firecrackers Prohibition Act, seeking a total ban on the sale, distribution, possession, and use of firecrackers and pyrotechnic devices. “We don’t need fireworks to enjoy a celebration. Let’s also think of the potential tragedies they can cause,” he said.

Perhaps, it’s time for the Philippines to take inspiration from global trends.

For instance, cities across the world are replacing fireworks and firecrackers with drone shows, or those displays that use hundreds of LED-lit drones to create breathtaking images in the sky, simulating fireworks or improving on them with spellbinding animated spectacles.

## Safety and sustainability

Drones are reusable and do not emit deafening noise that traumatizes not only humans but animals. Imagine a New Year’s Eve where dazzling aerial choreographies replace chaotic and harmful explosions—a celebration that is modern, safe, and sustainable.

Want something simpler and more affordable? Banging pots and pans or shaking coin-filled cans at home can usher in the New Year with just as much merriment as the crackle of firecrackers.

Firecrackers may have once symbolized holiday cheer and festivity, but Filipinos are better off embracing celebrations that align with modern safety and sustainability standards. The question New Year revelers must ask is this: Are pyrotechnic spectacles worth it? Is keeping up the tradition worth the price of torn body parts, hospital visits, and environmental damage?

As 2025 approaches, may good fortune come to those who celebrate it in ways that bring real joy while inflicting zero harm on people and the planet.