

Dec. 31
is now
a boom
time
as well

New Year’s holiday
is rivaling the Fourth
of July for illegal
fireworks, officials say.

By Salvador
Hernandez
and Andrew J. Campa

Bright yellow, red and blue lights burst high across the L.A. sky. The baritone booms of M-80s mix with the staccato snap of firecrackers. Move over, Fourth of July — the New Year’s holiday is encroaching on your illegal fireworks extravaganza status.

Fire departments throughout the region, including Los Angeles city and county, Long Beach and Pasadena, are bracing for a midnight onslaught of illegal fireworks Dec. 31 and warning residents of the dangers and consequences of shooting them off. Air quality officials are monitoring for unhealthy particulates. Dog owners are planning comfort rooms for their spooked pets.

“Typically, we see some fireworks larger than what some professionals do in some of our neighborhoods,” said Lisa Derderian, spokesperson for the city of Pasadena, which is in the New Year’s spotlight as the host city for the Rose Parade and Rose Bowl game.

While midnight booms — including illegally firing guns into the air — have long been the dangerous scourge of New Year’s Eve in Los Angeles, illegal, home-ignited fireworks displays have exponentially increased in recent years, city and fire officials said.

And they blame the pandemic.

Leading into Dec. 31, 2020, officials fearing COVID-19 “superspreader” gatherings told people to stay home. Revelers with little else to do turned to shooting off more fireworks than usual to ring in the new year. The same occurred in 2021, giving birth to a new trend.

Although New Year’s parties and large gatherings are back, the practice is lingering. Fire officials have seen a significant increase in [See Fireworks, A7]

Russia launches
aerial barrage

Ukraine says 122 missiles and dozens of drones used in on-slaughter killed at least 30 civilians. **WORLD, A3**

UC seeks to buy
old mall site

Former Westside Pavilion may help UCLA achieve its goal of expanding school’s capacity. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

‘She’s the next
greatest thing’

USC freshman JuJu Watkins is growing her fan base, including LeBron James of the Lakers. **SPORTS, B12**

Weather

Cooler and rainy.
L.A. Basin: 61/51. **B8**

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Photographs by BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

SURFERS navigate debris at Surfers Point in Ventura as they try to enter the water as large waves pound the beach on Thursday.

After respite, next wave on way

Officials close beaches in anticipation of more dangerous high surf

By Karen Garcia,
Christian Martinez,
Ashley Ahn
and Nathan Solis

A new rainstorm was expected to move into Southern California on Friday night as residents in some coastal communities dug out from big waves that damaged homes, closed beaches and left several people injured.

The West Coast is being inundated with rain and high surf thanks to powerful cyclonic storms spinning hundreds of miles off the coast and over the Pacific Ocean, forecasters said. From Medford, Ore., down to Los Angeles County, the end of the year will be awash in high surf, rain and coastal flooding.

Emergency officials are asking people to avoid the beaches and shorelines over the weekend. All



PHOTOGRAPHERS at Surfers Point in Ventura look to snap the right picture of the huge waves that hit the coast.

beaches and coastal parks in hard-hit Ventura County were closed Friday and will remain closed over the New Year’s weekend, including the Ventura Pier, seaside campgrounds and harbor entries, officials said. In Los Angeles County, the Manhattan Beach Pier will also be closed over the weekend and the Hermosa Beach Pier will be closed Saturday because of the high surf.

“Our recommendation is not to venture into the water, especially in those areas where the surf is showing heavy activity and large swells,” said Pono Barnes, spokesperson for the Los Angeles County Fire Department’s Lifeguard Division. “It’s not the best day to start your surfing journey or testing your skills in the water if you’re not 100% confident.”

High surf battered the California coast on Thursday, with Ventura [See Storm, A6]

Keeping Trump on California’s ballot

State official says law doesn’t allow her to exclude him. ‘I believe in this democracy.’

By Taryn Luna
and Mackenzie Mays

SACRAMENTO — California Secretary of State Shirley Weber is resisting pressure from within the Democratic Party to remove Donald Trump from the March statewide primary ballot due to his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol — arguing that, unlike the former Republican president, she feels obligated to follow the law.

Weber said she finds Trump’s “behavior and his

actions, not just as a former president, but as a citizen of the United States, to be abhorrent and disturbing and an attack on democracy.”

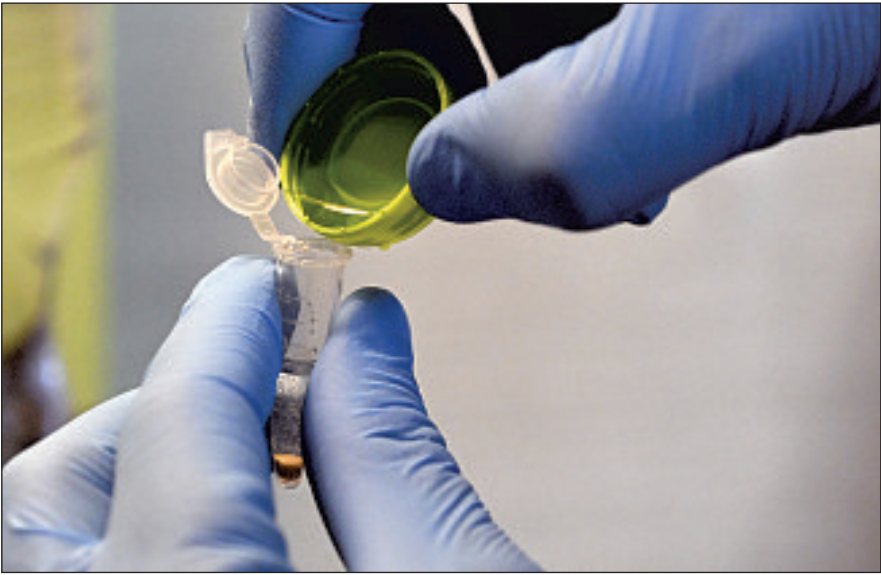
“But at the same time, if I believe in this democracy that is there, I have to basically continue to abide by the rule of law, and for me not to do that, then I am no better than Trump,” Weber told The Times on Friday. “And I must be better than Trump.”

Weber said attorneys in her office have been working for months with the California attorney general’s office and lawyers for local cities and counties to determine whether there was any legal ground to remove Trump from the March 5 primary ballot due to his role in the [See Weber, A7]



Rich Pedroncelli Associated Press

SHIRLEY WEBER, California’s secretary of state, said public trust in the voting process is crucial.



Wally Skaliy Los Angeles Times

TESTING of pills bought at Mexican pharmacies suggests often-dangerous fakes have grown more plentiful since January despite recent crackdowns.

A year of hushed warnings, hidden panels and fentanyl

Sales of fake meds persist at Mexican drugstores

By Keri Blakinger,
Brittany Mejia and Connor Sheets

PUERTO VALLARTA, Mexico — The tag on her white lab coat read “professional pharmacist,” and the framed health and safety certificates lining the walls behind her gave the drugstore an air of legitimacy.

That pretense faded seconds later, when she was asked for controlled medications — and got on her hands and knees to pop open a hidden panel under the counter. She rooted around for a minute

and emerged with two sealed bottles.

“These are from licensed laboratories,” she said. “The problem is when you’re buying from a laboratory that’s not certified.”

One of those bottles — sold as Adderall — tested positive for methamphetamine.

In pharmacy after pharmacy in this Mexican resort city, workers offered similar assurances, but time and again the pills proved to be fakes. There were oxycodone pills that tested positive for heroin and over-the-counter cough medicine, and Vicodin [See Mexican pills, A10]



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