



HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

M. S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

February 10, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Harris County Burn Ban Issued in Face of Continued Wildfire Threat



This cautionary statement is based on information provided by the Texas Forest Service, Governor's Division of Emergency Management, and the National Weather Service



There is a burn ban in effect for unincorporated Harris County. No outdoor burning is allowed except in an enclosure which contains all flames and/or sparks outdoor burning activities authorized by TCEQ, non-commercial cooking, and prescribed welding, grinding, cutting, or "hot work" operations.

"Despite this week's brief showers, the risk of damaging wildfires remains very high," says Harris County Fire Marshal Mike Montgomery. "The key concerns are a large amount of dry fuel, mostly tall grass and brush, and variable winds."

In the Houston area, the forecast for fire risk remains **HIGH** to **VERY HIGH**, depending on wind speed. "Fire departments have been responding to a growing number of grass fires, and stronger winds can spread a fire rapidly, even if there are no "Red Flag" warnings in the area" says Montgomery.

Under the conditions of the ban, outdoor burning is allowed in an enclosure that doesn't allow the escape of flames, embers, or sparks. Backyard cook-outs and barbecues are also allowed. However, violation of the ban is a Class "C" misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. In addition, any person who starts a fire that causes damage to property without the consent of the owner may be charged with Reckless Damage or Destruction, a Class C misdemeanor, or Arson, a felony.

"The burn ban is precautionary and not punitive," says Montgomery. "But people need to be very careful, and not burn outdoors on dry or windy days, period. The risk is too high, especially on days where a "red flag" warning has been issued."

For the public:

- You are responsible for any damage caused by a fire you start.
- **There is a burn ban in effect for all areas of unincorporated Harris County.** Burning in violation of the court order is a Class "C" misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. Any peace officer can issue a citation for violation of Section 352.081 of the Local Government Code.
- **Listen for "Red Flag" warnings.** Use extreme caution when cooking outdoors. A small spark or burning ember can ignite dry vegetation. Winds will fan the flames and spread the fire rapidly.
- Remove combustibles within 30 feet of any controlled fire or hot work. A small, controlled fire can easily spread quickly and become an out-of-control, dangerous fire.
- If you see an unattended fire, **call 9-1-1 and notify your local fire department immediately.** Even a small fire can spread quickly and threaten people and houses.

For fire departments:

- **There is a burn ban in effect for all areas of unincorporated Harris County.** Burning in violation of the court order is a Class “C” misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. Any peace officer can issue a citation for violation of Section 352.081 of the Local Government Code. If you need assistance to investigate any suspected violations of the burn ban, contact the Harris County Fire Marshal.
- Public and firefighter safety remains the top priority. Other priorities are:
 - Protection of life and property
 - Rapid and effective wildfire response
 - Firefighter safety
 - Rapid damage assessment
- **Listen for “Red Flag” warnings.** Place calls EARLY for additional firefighters or specialized equipment -- water tenders/tankers, bulldozers, and four-wheel drive trucks. Allow for extended response times or other delays. Use automatic aid when appropriate – the closest response may include departments other than your own.
- Encourage employers to support the quick response of Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) by allowing their employees to respond to local fires when needed.
- Participate in the TFS web-based reporting system to document costs needed to attain possible FEMA financial support for wildfire operations. The website is: <http://tfsfrp.tamu.edu/firereporting/vfd/default.asp>
- Identify and prepare fire-fighting equipment and crews that could deploy to other parts of the state if requested through your local MAC (multi-agency coordinating center) or Regional TIFMAS representative.
 - For Harris County, the TIFMAS contact is: Randy Parr, 281-290-1301.

For additional information about the current wildfire threat, visit the Texas Interagency Coordinating Center website at: <http://www.tamu.edu/ticc>

Sincerely,



Mike Montgomery
Director/Fire Marshal