

MDC Encourages People To Help Prevent Wildfires

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reminds people that strong winds, low humidity, and dry conditions this time of year means extra caution is needed to avoid unexpected wildfires. According to MDC's Forestry Division, the main cause of wildfires is improper burning of debris such as leaves or brush piles.

"It's been drier and warmer than usual, which means fires could get out of control very quickly," said Forestry Field Program Supervisor Ben Webster. "We want everyone to check the weather and be extremely careful if they plan to burn leaves or debris."

Each year, MDC staff work with fire departments around the state to help suppress numerous wildfires that can consume thousands of acres. MDC urges landowners, hunters, campers, and others in the outdoors to help prevent wildfires and offers the following tips.

OUTDOOR BURNING

Do not conduct outdoor burning during times when grasses, brush and other fire fuel are very dry, humidity is low and weather is windy. Dry fuel -- combined with high temperatures, low humidity and high winds -- makes fire nearly impossible to control. Check with local fire departments regarding local burn ordinances or burn bans that may be in place.

A person who starts a fire for any reason is responsible for any damage it may cause.

Done properly, prescribed fire can be a beneficial tool to improve land for wildlife habitat and grazing. For more information on using prescribed fire as a land-management tool, visit mdc.mo.gov and search "Prescribed Fire."

DRIVING OFF ROAD

Wildfires can start when fine, dry fuel such as grass comes in contact with catalytic converters on motor vehicles. Think twice before driving into and across a grassy field. Never park over tall, dry grass or piles of leaves that can touch the underside of a vehicle.

When driving vehicles off road, regularly inspect the undercarriage to ensure that fuel and brake lines are intact and no oil leaks are apparent. Always carry an approved fire extinguisher on vehicles that are used off road. Check for the presence of spark arresters on ATV exhausts.

MAKING A CAMPFIRE

Clear a generous zone around fire rings. When humidity is low and wind is high, debris can become tinder for a stray spark or ember. Store unused firewood a good distance from the fire. Never use gasoline, kerosene, or other flammable liquid to start a fire.

Keep campfires small and controllable. Keep fire-extinguishing materials, such as a rake, shovel and bucket of water, close by. Never leave a campfire unattended! Extinguish campfires each night and before leaving camp, even for a few moments.

SMOKERS: PRACTICE EXTRA CAUTION

Extinguish cigarettes completely and safely, and dispose of butts responsibly.

DON'T DELAY CALLING FOR HELP!

Call 911 at the first sign of a fire getting out of control.

REPORT FOREST ARSON

Many wildfires are set by vandals.

Help stop arson by calling Operation Forest Arson at 800-392-1111. Callers will remain anonymous and rewards are possible.

For more information on preventing wildfires, go online to mdc.mo.gov/your-property/fire/wildfire-prevention.