

Warm, Dry Weather May Fuel a Big Fire Season

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : June 18, 2009 at 5:30 am

SEATTLE - Ample moisture and cooler temperatures for Alaska and Pacific Northwest states may keep 2009 fire potential in normal ranges, but after multiple weeks of warm weather, fuel supplies are drying out. Persistent drought conditions may well drive significant wildfire risk for north-central Washington, and the recent near-record spring dry spell is boosting fire risk in western Washington as well. FEMA Acting Regional Administrator Dennis Hunsinger encourages residents living on wooded lots and wildland/urban interface areas to stay informed on local conditions and take steps now-clearing brush and creating defensible perimeters around their homes.

"Wildfires are unpredictable, and can start and spread with incredible speed, so it's important to go into this year's wildfire season with a solid plan," said Hunsinger. "The time to discuss wildfire warnings and evacuation strategies with your local forestry and emergency management officials is before wildfires rage." FEMA recommends that residents take specific actions long before an evacuation is necessary. Clear any flammable materials from around the home. Construct roofs and exterior walls from non-combustible or fire resistant material such as slate, tile, sheet iron, aluminum, brick or stone. Treat wood siding, cedar shingles, exterior wood paneling and other highly combustible materials with fire retardant chemicals. Clean roof surfaces and gutters free of pine needles, leaves, and branches regularly. Space landscape plants to limit fire from spreading to surrounding vegetation or structures. Maintain fuel breaks around all structures. Store gasoline only in approved containers, and well away from occupied buildings. Store firewood and other combustibles away from structures. Keep firefighting tools (such as ladders, shovels, rakes and water buckets) handy, and water hoses connected. House numbers and all street signs should be clear of overgrowth and always be visible. Clear roads and driveways of vegetation overgrowth so fire vehicles have room to maneuver. Place a lawn sprinkler on the roof, which can be turned on when evacuating to wet the roof. It is also smart to keep important personal documents quickly available should you need to evacuate. Consider collecting your driver's license, passport and other identification, birth and marriage certificates, Social Security card, insurance policies, tax records, wills, deed or lease and stocks and bonds. Also, know where your main turn-off switches are for electricity, water and gas. Another important step that FEMA recommends is preparing an evacuation kit. Items should be put in a container that can be easily loaded into a vehicle for a quick departure. Items to include: Flashlight Battery-powered radio with additional batteries First aid kit Medicines, prescriptions and eyeglasses Water (at least one gallon per person and enough for three days for each person in the household) Change of clothing Sleeping bags and pillows Cash and credit cards FEMA also recommends that family members discuss how to contact one another if the wildfire comes near when family members are separated. Discuss evacuation routes and identify relatives or friends outside the immediate area that can be contacted. Finally, make sure your pets have collars and identification tags and take your pets with you if you need to evacuate. While some shelters won't accept pets, an increasing number of communities are organizing pet shelters when large evacuations are necessary. Check with your local Humane Society, animal shelter or veterinarian. For more information on protecting your family and your home from wildfires, go to www.fema.gov, or www.ready.gov. FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that

as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.