

## **Extreme fire risk prompts call for extreme caution**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA — With fire danger continuing to increase across Washington, officials from four state agencies today urged residents to recognize that even seemingly low-risk activities, such as parking on a grassy field or using motorized yard tools, can spark a wildfire.

Thirty-seven of the state's 39 counties have declared burn bans. Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark has banned fires on all lands protected by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), including wildlife areas and other facilities managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

However, even those protections don't address all the ways people can unintentionally spark a wildfire.

"Most people are responsible and use good judgment," said Mary Verner, DNR's Deputy Supervisor for Resource Protection. "On the other hand, most wildfires are human-caused. We want to alert people to the extremely hazardous conditions and ask that they take extra precaution even with routine and seemingly safe activities."

Bruce Bjork, Chief of Enforcement for WDFW, said people driving off-road can start a fire simply by driving across or parking on a grassy field, like those that exist at most of the department's nearly 200 wildlife area units. "Dry grass touching a vehicle's hot exhaust system could start a major fire, especially when the wind is blowing," said Bjork. "If you're driving through the woods or open range, please stay on the road surface until you find a paved or graveled area to park."

Another frequent cause of brush fires, particularly in urban areas, is simple smoker's carelessness.

"In this day and age, we are still seeing brush fires on the sides of our highways caused by people tossing out their lit cigarettes," said Washington State Fire Marshal Chuck Duffy.

"Tossing a lit cigarette from a vehicle isn't just littering. It's a separate violation that could cost you a \$1,025 fine."

Some of the other ways fires start can include:

- Refueling lawn mowers without giving the engine a chance to cool down. A small spill can become a big fire.

- Using metal blades on brush cutters. They can spark if they hit a rock or piece of metal and can easily start a fire in freshly cut brush.

- Salvaging, welding, or grinding metal near any kind of vegetation.

- Target shooting at rocks or metal in dry vegetation or using exploding targets. It's also important for everyone, not just those living in remote areas, to be ready in case fire strikes their neighborhood. "Homeowners should also be taking steps to avoid the spread of any fire that does start," said Major General Bret Daugherty, the state's adjutant general.

"Any dead plants or vegetation near your home should be removed as soon as possible. And woodpiles and propane tanks should be stored no closer than 30 feet from your home. I would also encourage Washingtonians to create a personal preparedness plan — and consider

pre-loading your car with emergency supplies like water, food and vital records in case you're asked to evacuate.

In short, even in the face of bans on burning, there are many other kinds of activities that can lead to fire. Officials state-wide are urging everyone to be careful with all outdoor activities, even if they don't plan to toast s'mores over a traditional camp fire. OLYMPIA — With fire danger continuing to increase across Washington, officials from four state agencies today urged residents to recognize that even seemingly low-risk activities, such as parking on a grassy field or using motorized yard tools, can spark a wildfire.

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