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State Agencies Highlight Continued Need for Fire Safety

SPRINGFIELD – In recent days, dry conditions and gusty winds have fueled countless fires destroying miles of farmland, valuable equipment, structures and in some cases severely injuring those involved. Fires can occur at any time of year and anywhere in the country, including remote rural areas, state or national parks, or even in your backyard. Wildfires can be sparked from natural sources, such as lightning, or accidentally by humans via cigarettes, campfires or grills, or by mechanical sparks coming into contact with flammable materials. It is with that in mind that state officials are urging Illinois residents to heed the warnings issued by National Weather Service meteorologists and local officials to reduce the risk of fall fires.

The National Weather Service (NWS) will issue Red Flag Warnings when weather conditions, such as strong winds, low relative humidity and high temperatures, make for outdoor fire dangers. During these dangerous times, the NWS urges everyone to use extreme caution because a simple spark can create a major fire. Sparks or embers can blow into leaves or grass, igniting a fire that can quickly spread.

“People need to heed the warnings when there is an elevated fire danger and think about the possible consequences of their actions. These fires not only cause damage to property, and could cost some people their livelihoods, but also put first responders in harm’s way who are trying to battle these fires which are preventable if people think and act responsibly,” said State Fire Marshal Matt Perez.

Watches and warnings are issued by the National Weather Service and enforced by local officials. Watches are issued up to 72-hours before dangerous conditions are expected to occur; whereas, a warning is issued when the conditions are expected to occur or are occurring within the next 24-hours.

“This past week’s dry and windy conditions resulted in field fires across our state, adding stress to the harvest season,” said Jerry Costello II, IDOA Acting Director. “Our thoughts are with those farmers and their families that experienced crop loss. We encourage fire safety and fire prevention to be a part of every farmer’s farm safety plan."

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“Mutual Aid resources are utilized daily at the local level to provide community to community assistance. When seconds count, a strong mutual aid system is an important lifeline to foster and develop,” said Alicia Tate-Nadeau, IEMA Director. “The team at the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS) is a valuable partner to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the State of Illinois. This organization of trained professionals is a critical component of our robust mutual aid system, and those partnerships proved invaluable in recent days.”

Nearly nine out of 10 wildfires, nationally, are caused by humans and could have been prevented. Before any fire happens, make sure your home or business is resistant to catching fire. This can be accomplished by clearing away debris and other flammable materials and using fire-resistant materials for landscaping and construction.

What You Should Know about Wildfires

- Know what to do before, during and after a wildfire;
- Learn your evacuation routes;
- Have emergency supplies in place at home, work and in the car;
- Listen to local officials for instructions and plan to evacuate if advised;
- Keep track of fires near your community or where you plan to vacation with https://fsapps.nwcg.gov/afm/index.php; and
- If you evacuated an area due to a wildfire, wait for public officials to say it is safe before returning.

Camping Fire and Burn Safety

Cooler temperatures make for great hiking and camping weather in Illinois. Before you plan your next adventure, officials with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) encourage you to make fall fire prevention plan.

“Moving into fall, we’ve seen low humidity, dry ground and gusty winds, exponentially increasing the chances of wildland and forest fires,” said IDNR Director Colleen Callahan. “Even though we’re moving into the tail end of camping season, with conditions like these it’s incredibly important for campers to keep a close eye on warnings from the National Weather Service and always monitor campfires and stoves. A small spark can get out of hand in a matter of seconds.”

By following these safety tips, campers can help prevent fires at IDNR sites and even private campgrounds:

- At campgrounds at state parks and other IDNR-managed sites, fires are allowed in stoves, grills or other designated areas only. Large bonfires are not permitted without permission of the site superintendent.

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- Have a supply of water or fire extinguisher and shovel readily available before building your fire.
- Never use a flammable liquid (especially gasoline) to start a fire or on hot coals. Explosions can result.
- When near campfires and grills, wear snug-fitting, tightly woven, or short-sleeved garments.
- Pitch tents at least 15 feet upwind from grills and fire pits.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Before you leave your campsite, make sure coals are thoroughly extinguished before disposal.
- If your fire gets out of control, note your location and call 9-1-1 for assistance.

Learn more safety tips at www.ready.gov/wildfires.

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