



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Chris Christie, Governor
Kim Guadagno, Lt. Governor
Bob Martin, Commissioner



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Contact: Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795
Bob Considine (609) 292-2994
Rob Geist (609) 633-7588

NEW JERSEY FOREST FIRE SERVICE URGES CAUTION WITH START TO WILDFIRE SEASON

(17/P33) TRENTON – The New Jersey Forest Fire Service is urging the public to exercise caution with spring wildfire season getting under way.



Ninety-nine percent of wildfires are caused by people, through accidents, carelessness, negligence and even arson. Being extra vigilant to reduce that risk is especially critical at this time of year, when weather conditions and other factors can increase the risk of wildfires.

“The beginning of wildfire season can vary from year to year, depending on weather conditions,” said Forest Fire Service Chief Bill Edwards. “This year we are off to a somewhat earlier start because the winter became drier and warmer than normal as we progressed into late February. We cannot stress enough that a moment of carelessness can lead to wildfires that can place properties and lives at risk.”

Dry, warmer and windy conditions increase the risk for wildfire, especially this time of year when trees and understory bushes have not fully gotten their leaves. Fallen trees and limbs, dormant woody plants, and leaves and pine needles dry out quickly and can act as tinder for wildfires that can threaten property.

All regions of the state are currently classified as being at moderate risk of wildfires.

Fire risks increase as more homes are built in wooded areas. The Pinelands ecosystem, covering a large swath of southern New Jersey, is particularly vulnerable because of its predominant tree and shrub species. The region also dries out quickly after rainfall because of its porous and sandy soil.

Most wildfires are preventable. Residents and visitors can follow these guidelines to reduce fire risk:

- Use ashtrays in vehicles. Discarding cigarettes, matches and smoking materials on the ground is a violation of New Jersey law.
- Obtain required permits for campfires. Don't leave fires unattended. Douse them completely.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children. Teach them about the dangers of fire.
- People living in forested or wooded areas should maintain a defensible buffer by clearing vegetation within at least 30 feet of any structures. Also, make sure fire trucks can access driveways.
- The Forest Fire Service strongly urges anyone who owns property in the Pinelands to maintain at least 100 feet of "defensible space" around structures, meaning these areas should be clear of vegetation that will burn easily as well as fallen leaves, pine needles, twigs and branches.
- Report suspicious vehicles and individuals to authorities.
- Be careful when using wood stoves and fireplaces, both of which can emit embers that can spark fires. Also, fully douse ashes with water before disposal.



The State Forest Fire Service works to prevent wildfires year-round through public outreach and education efforts, maintenance of fire breaks and prescribed burning.

This winter and spring, the State Forest Fire Service conducted prescribed burning operations on more than 15,000 acres of woodlands and grasslands. These controlled burns reduce fire risks and keep forests healthy by burning away leaves, fallen branches and trees, and

dense undergrowth at times when weather conditions are favorable.

The basic approach the Forest Fire Service uses to contain larger wildfires is to surround them with containment lines consisting of cleared breaks in the woods, existing roads, and topographical features such as wetlands and rivers. Firefighters light backfires ahead of the main fire to eliminate combustible fuels and stop the main fire's forward progress. The fire in the containment area will be monitored until it burns itself out.

For more information about the New Jersey Forest Fire Service, wildfire safety, prevention, tips on protecting your home, and current conditions, visit: www.njwildfire.org

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