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County Issues Burn Ban Starting June 23

Fire officials strongly discourage fireworks

Thurston County officials are issuing a countywide burn ban that will take affect at 5 p.m. today, Tuesday, June 23. This ban covers all of unincorporated Thurston County. The Cities and UGA already have a full time burning ban. The burn ban decision comes as weather forecasters predict record high temperatures coming later this week along with the possibility of lightning strikes, but little or no precipitation.

“This weather pattern of high temperatures combined with lightening but no rain is expected to last through the Fourth of July weekend. That means the burn ban is a critical part of protecting lives and property. Our local firefighters will have their hands full as it is,” said Resource Stewardship department director Scott Clark, who also serves as the county’s fire marshal.

The countywide ban on outdoor burning applies to all land clearing and yard debris burning. However, residents, outside the cities and UGA where there is a full time open burning ban, will still be able to enjoy small recreational fires in fire pits, as well as cooking with outdoor barbeques and stoves. The use of self-contained camp stoves is encouraged as an alternative to recreational fires. All small recreational fires must meet the following criteria:

- Fires must be contained in a metal or concrete fire pit like those that are typically used at campgrounds. These fires cannot be used for debris disposal.
- Fires must be only three feet in diameter or smaller.
- Fires must be located in a spot that is completely clear of vegetation. The fire must be at least 10 feet away from any vegetation, 25 feet away from any structure or building, and overhanging branches must be at least 20 feet above the fire.
- All recreational fires must be attended at all times by an alert individual. All individuals attending fires must be able to extinguish the fire with a readily available shovel and a 5-gallon bucket of water, or with a readily available water hose that is connected and charged.

- All recreational fires must be completely extinguished by pouring water or moist soil on the fire and stirring with a shovel until all parts are cool to the touch.
- There is no burning at all when winds exceed 5 mph.

If you see illegal burning or evidence of a wildfire, call 9-1-1 immediately. The penalty for illegal burning during a countywide burn ban is a fine up to \$1,000 or up to 90 days in jail. “Conditions are really dangerous right now, so anyone planning on barbecuing or having a campfire needs to follow the rules and keep it under control. If you don’t, you should expect the county to enforce the restrictions. It’s a matter of public safety,” said Clark.

The countywide burn ban does not apply to fireworks, but fire officials are strongly encouraging residents to reduce the risk of fires and enjoy only the professional fireworks displays this year. Some of the cities within Thurston County have already imposed a ban or have specific restriction on the use of fireworks, so, citizens living within the UGA should check for any city regulations prior to using them.

“We’re already in the midst of a statewide drought, and the record high temperatures coming our way can make even the tiniest fireworks spark turn into a raging fire within minutes,” said Chief Steve Brooks, President of the Thurston County Fire Chiefs’ Association. “It’s best to leave the fireworks to the pros this year.”

Residents who do light their own fireworks this year are reminded that the sale of fireworks in unincorporated Thurston County is legal only at inspected and approved stands from noon on June 28 through 9 p.m. on July 4. Daily sales before July 4 are from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Discharging fireworks is legal only between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. on July 3 and 4. The sale and discharge of fireworks is not allowed in the cities of Olympia or Lacey.

To learn more about fireworks safety and injury prevention, go to the Washington State Patrol’s web page on fireworks safety at www.wsp.wa.gov/fire/fireworks.htm. The Washington State Patrol website also has a list of public fireworks displays in Thurston County and throughout the state.