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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Harris County Commissioners Court Approves 90-day Burn Ban



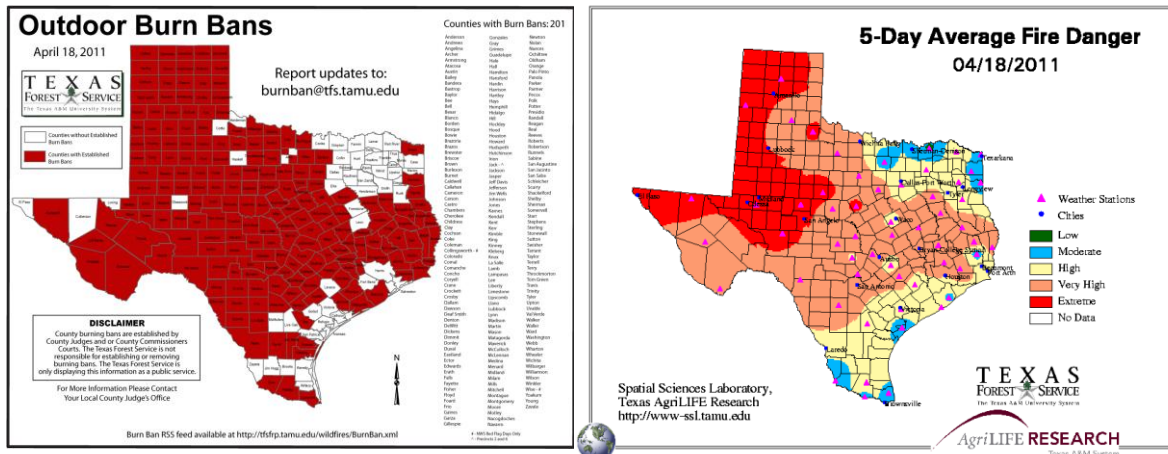
This cautionary statement is based on information provided by the Texas Forest Service and the National Weather Service



Today, Harris County Commissioners Court enacted a burn ban due to an increased threat of wildfires across Harris County. There are now 202 Texas counties with burn bans, including Harris, Chambers, Grimes, Liberty, Montgomery, and Waller counties.

No outdoor burning is allowed except in an enclosure which contains all flames and/or sparks, outdoor burning activities authorized by TCEQ, approved ceremonial fires, non-commercial cooking, and prescribed "hot work". Backyard cook-outs and barbeques are also allowed, as is welding and other "hot work" performed in accordance with county fire code requirements.

Violation of the ban is a Class "C" misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. In addition, any person who starts a fire that causes damage to property without the consent of the owner may be charged with Reckless Damage or Destruction, a Class C misdemeanor, or Arson, a felony.



Parts of Texas, including Harris County, are extremely dry and vegetative fuels have reached critical dryness. Observed fire danger is **VERY HIGH** across Harris County. Area fire departments responded to 78 outdoor fires this past weekend, including two fires in the Spring/Klein area that threatened more than 40 homes and required several bulldozers and ground crews to contain. Three firefighters have been injured, none seriously.

Across Texas, resources have been spread thin battling numerous wildfires fueled by historic drought and critical fire weather conditions. According to the Texas Forest Service, over 6,000 outdoor fires have burned more than 1.6 million acres and destroyed 740 structures since January 1. One firefighter has been killed battling these blazes. Governor Rick Perry has again extended the disaster proclamation for threat of extreme wildfires across Texas.

For the public:

- **There is a burn ban in effect for all areas of unincorporated Harris County.**
- **No outdoor burning is allowed** except in an enclosure which contains all flames and/or sparks, outdoor burning activities authorized by TCEQ, approved ceremonial fires, non-commercial cooking, and prescribed “hot work”. Backyard cook-outs barbeques are also allowed, as is welding and other “hot work” performed in accordance with county fire code requirements.
- Burning in violation of the court order is a Class “C” misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. Any peace officer can issue a citation for violation of Section 352.081 of the Local Government Code. You are responsible for any damage caused by a fire you start.
- **Listen for “Red Flag” warnings.** Use extreme caution when cooking outdoors. A small spark or burning ember can ignite dry vegetation. Winds will fan the flames and spread the fire rapidly.
- Remove combustibles within 30 feet of any controlled fire or hot work. A small, controlled fire can easily spread quickly and become an out-of-control, dangerous fire.
- If you see an unattended fire, **call 9-1-1 and notify your local fire department immediately.** Even a small fire can spread quickly and threaten people and houses.

For fire departments:

- **There is a burn ban in effect for all areas of unincorporated Harris County.** Burning in violation of the court order is a Class “C” misdemeanor, punishable for up to a \$500 fine. Any peace officer can issue a citation for violation of Section 352.081 of the Local Government Code. If you need assistance to investigate any suspected violations of the burn ban, contact the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office at 281-999-2200.
- **Public and firefighter safety remains the top priority.** Other priorities are:
 - Protection of life and property
 - Rapid and effective wildfire response
 - Firefighter safety
 - Rapid damage assessment
- **Listen for “Red Flag” warnings.** Place calls EARLY for additional firefighters or specialized equipment -- water tenders/tankers, bulldozers, and four-wheel drive trucks. Allow for extended response times or other delays. Use automatic aid when appropriate – the closest response may include departments other than your own.
- Encourage employers to support the quick response of Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) by allowing their employees to respond to local fires when needed.
- Participate in the TFS web-based reporting system to document costs needed to attain possible FEMA financial support for wildfire operations. The website is: <http://tfsfrp.tamu.edu/firereporting/vfd/default.asp>

For additional information about the current wildfire threat and ongoing efforts to inform and protect Texas communities, visit the Texas Interagency Coordinating Center website at: <http://ticc.tamu.edu/>

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