# HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

**FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE**

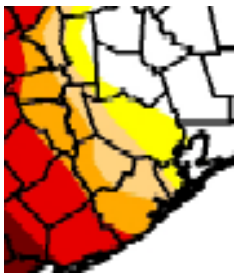
**M. S. Montgomery**
***Fire Marshal***

April 21, 2009

**It rained so much over the weekend -- Why is there still a burn ban?**

***This cautionary statement is based on information provided by the Texas Forest Service, Governor's Division of Emergency Management, and the National Weather Service***

Despite recent rains, **there is a burn ban in effect for unincorporated Harris County.** But, why?



- Harris County is still in an area characterized by the National Drought Mitigation Center as "Abnormally dry" to "Moderate Drought". This weekend's rains were much needed and have saturated the soil for now. The long-term outlook is not as positive.
- Even though the GROUND is wet, FUELS ABOVE THE GROUND have already begun to dry out, daytime temperatures are rising, and daytime winds are predicted to be from the west at variable speeds over the next few days. This increases the risk of outdoor fire spread.

Under the burn ban conditions, outdoor burning **is allowed** in an enclosure that doesn't allow the escape of flames, embers, or sparks. Backyard cook-outs and barbeques are also allowed. So are outdoor burns permitted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality ("TCEQ").

**So what does that mean if you have debris that you need to get rid of?**

- You are allowed to burn outdoors IF the activity is:
  - In an enclosure which contains all flames and/or sparks;
  - Authorized by TCEQ;
  - Non-commercial cooking and barbeques, including some camp fires;
  - A prescribed welding, grinding, cutting, or "hot work" operation.
- Consider alternatives to burning, such as mulching, chipping, composting, or landfilling; or
- Contact the regional TCEQ at 713-767-3714 to see if you qualify for an exception.

A little common sense goes a long way. It is illegal to burn at night, or to burn in the open where flames, embers, or sparks can escape. You should never burn on dry or windy days.

And remember, a violation of the burn ban is a Class "C" misdemeanor, punishable by up to $500 fine. In addition, if you start 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.

Sincerely,

Mike Montgomery
Director/Fire Marshal

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