



HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

M. S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

July 16, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Governor Perry issues Wildfire Disaster Declaration

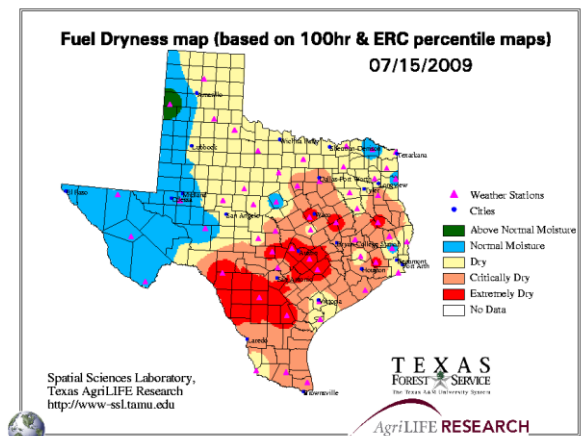
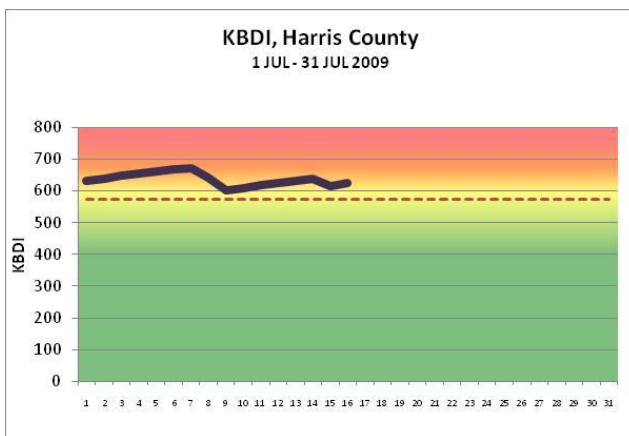


This cautionary statement is based on information provided by the Texas Forest Service and the National Weather Service



Today, Governor Perry declared a disaster due to wildfires in 165 counties, including Harris County.

Parts of Texas, including Harris County, are extremely dry and have entered a state of critical fire weather that is expected to last into August -- long periods of triple digit temperatures and little to no precipitation. Impact to outdoor fuels has been dramatic and fuel moistures are setting record low values. As such, we can expect fire activity and intensities to increase over the next two to four weeks in this area.



Observed fire danger is **VERY HIGH** north of I-10 and **HIGH** across the rest of the county. Area fire departments have reported more than 400 outdoor fires in the past month.

Statewide Mutual Aid is in effect. The Texas Intra-Agency Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS) will coordinate regional and state-wide resource requests. Fire departments are strongly encouraged to participate in the TFS web based reporting system. This is extremely critical to seeking financial reimbursement assistance. The website is: tfsfrp.tamu.edu/firereporting.

There is a burn ban in 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, 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 International 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.

For the public:

- **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. 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.
- 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>
- Identify and prepare fire-fighting equipment and crews that could deploy to other parts of the state if requested through your local MAC (multi-agency coordinating center) or Regional TIFMAS representative.
 - For Harris County, the TIFMAS contact is: Randy Parr, 281-290-1301.

For additional information about the current wildfire threat, visit the Texas Interagency Coordinating Center website at: <http://www.tamu.edu/ticc>