



News Release

For more information, contact:
Wendy Burnett
478.751.3535
wburnett@gfc.state.ga.us
GaTrees.org

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EXTRA CAUTION NEEDED DURING GEORGIA'S FIRE SEASON

Breezy, warm spring days are perfect for enjoying the outdoors, but they're perfect, too, for wildfires. To prevent the spread of wildfire, the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) is urging residents to take extra precautions when burning yard debris, using an outdoor grill or enjoying campfires.

"Half of all the wildfires in Georgia every year happen between January and April," said Greg Strenkowski, GFC Staff Forester. "The number one cause of wildfire is escaped debris burning, so we want to make sure everybody remembers what's necessary to burn safely."

Evaluating the weather is an important first step before lighting a match outdoors, according to Strenkowski. Wind carries sparks, and Georgia's largest and most damaging wildfires have been recorded on windy April days. In April of 2007, Georgia experienced its largest wildfire in history, burning some 560,000 acres and causing millions of dollars in damage.

"Always get a burn permit before you burn," said Strenkowski. "They're really easy to obtain. Just call 1-877-OK2-BURN, or log onto GaTrees.org. If weather conditions are good, your permit will be given within minutes." While permits aren't needed for grills or campfires in designated areas, extra caution should always be exercised around their use.

Strenkowski said mid-morning to early afternoon are the best times to burn, and he recommends a little preparatory work before fires are started. Neighbors should be notified in advance about the fire's possible smoke. Be sure to wear proper work clothes, including long pants, long sleeves, work gloves and boots while preparing your burn pile. A 25-foot barrier should be raked around the pile, and emergency equipment such as a water hose and hand tools should be close by. Avoid having dirt or moist debris in the pile; both hold in moisture and cause excess smoke.

Strenkowski went on to advise that dead grass, leaves and straw should be cleared from nearby decks and roof tops, as buildings and vehicles can easily ignite if flames spread onto them. In addition, if utility poles are located on your property, their bases should always be cleared of flammable debris to prevent fire damage and possible injury.

"Don't be tempted to use gasoline or lighter fluid on your outdoor fire because they can be dangerous," advised Strenkowski. "And make sure the fire is completely out before you leave it unattended. The burn area should be cool to the touch before a fire is considered finished."

For more information on safe burning practices and Georgia's forest industry, visit GaTrees.org.

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