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CONTACT:  
Dean Flener, TEMA  
615-741-0430  
[dean.flener@tn.gov](mailto:dean.flener@tn.gov)

## State Agencies Ask Tennesseans to Reduce the Risk of Wildfires to Their Homes & Communities

**Nashville, Tenn. – National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day** is Saturday, May 6, 2017, and state officials are asking Tennesseans to increase their preparedness for wildfires and take extra precautions to make their homes and communities safer.

“Last fall Tennessee experienced several wildfires including the catastrophic Sevier County fire were the result of persistent drought conditions and hotter temperatures meeting with the right weather conditions to cause the worst wildland urban interface fire in Tennessee history,” said Director Patrick Sheehan, of the **Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA)**. “Weather forecasts are indicating warmer and drier conditions for Tennessee through spring and early summer. So, we are asking everyone to be aware of wildfire risks and to take extra care to avoid needless and potentially deadly wildfires.”

Wildfire preparedness begins at home and **TEMA** offers the following tips to reduce the potential for wildfires on residential and business properties:

- Clear leaves and other debris from gutters, eaves, porches and decks. This prevents embers from igniting your home.
- Remove dead vegetation and other items from under your deck or porch, and within 10 feet of the house.
- Screen or box-in areas below patios and decks with wire mesh to prevent debris and combustible materials from accumulating.
- Remove flammable materials (firewood stacks, propane tanks) within 30 feet of your home’s foundation and outbuildings, including garages and sheds. If it can catch fire, don’t let it touch your house, deck or porch.
- Wildfire can spread to tree tops. Prune trees so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet from the ground.
- Keep your lawn hydrated and maintained. If it is brown, cut it down to reduce fire intensity. Dry grass and shrubs are fuel for wildfire.
- Don’t let debris and lawn cuttings linger. Dispose of these items quickly to reduce fuel for fire.
- Inspect shingles or roof tiles. Replace or repair those that are loose or missing to prevent ember penetration.
- Cover exterior attic vents with metal wire mesh no larger than 1/8 inch to prevent sparks from entering the home.

- Enclose under-eave and soffit vents or screens with metal mesh to prevent ember entry.

Home wildfire preparations should also include planning evacuation and escape routes, putting together a family emergency kit, and having emergency plans for the whole family, especially those with special needs, and pets.

As the weather turns warmer and more Tennesseans spend time outdoors, the **State Fire Marshal's Office**, a division of the **Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance (TDCI)** offers the following basic, outdoor fire safety tips:

- Have an adult present at all times when a bonfire, chiminea, fire pit, or outdoor fireplace is burning.
- Keep children and pets at least three feet away from open flames.
- Consider using battery-operated flameless candles and solar-powered patio (tiki) torches outside in place of an open flame. Flameless candles come in all colors, shapes and sizes, and are a safer alternative.
- A grill should be placed well away from the home and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.
- If using a gas grill, always make sure your grill lid is open before lighting it.
- If you smell gas while cooking, move away from the grill and call the fire department immediately. Do not move the grill.
- If using a charcoal grill, let the coals completely cool before disposing in a metal container.
- Never leave a grill unattended.
- Never park a vehicle over a pile of leaves. The heat from the vehicle's catalytic converter or exhaust system could ignite the leaves below.

"The risk to lives, homes and property is too great to ever take outdoor burning lightly," said **TDCI** Commissioner and **State Fire Marshal** Julie Mix McPeak. "Tennesseans should always take extra precautions when burning outdoors and report any suspicious or unauthorized fires immediately to local and state law enforcement authorities."

The **Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry** reminds Tennesseans that from Oct. 15 until May 15, a permit is required for outdoor debris burning.

"Tennesseans are aware of the difficult fire season we experienced last fall that was highlighted by the loss of life and property in Sevier County," State Forester Jere Jeter said. "I want to remind everyone to obtain a permit when one is required for outdoor burning and to exercise extreme caution when burning. Any controlled fire has the potential to escape and become a harmful wildfire. Your fire is your responsibility."

You can obtain a free burn permit online at [www.burnsafetn.org](http://www.burnsafetn.org) or by calling your local division of Forestry office. If you live within a city's limits, there may be additional

requirements to burn, regardless of the time of year. The website [www.burnsafetn.org](http://www.burnsafetn.org) is a valuable resource for tips to burn debris safely and to protect your home and property from wildfire.

The **Tennessee Department of Transportation** strongly urges motorists to avoid throwing lit cigarettes out of their vehicles. This type of litter can quickly start grass fires that can lead to dangerous traffic situations, such as low visibility and congestion.

**Tennessee State Parks** is asking state park visitors to be observant with campfires in the campgrounds. Park visitors should immediately report a fire or what could be a potential fire danger to 911, and observe the following basic fire safety tips:

- Use designated areas - Campfires in Tennessee State Parks must be contained within designated grills or fire grates.
- Be responsible - Never leave a fire unattended, even for a minute. Smoke in a car or designated area if possible. Dispose of cigarettes in a non-flammable container. Don't allow children and pets near the campfire and never leave them unsupervised.
- Ensure your campfire is completely extinguished with water before leaving.
- Play it safe - Keep a bucket of water and a shovel nearby. Stack extra wood upwind and away from the fire. After lighting, do not discard the match until it is cold.

**Wildfire Community Preparedness Day** serves as a call-to-action for people of all ages to plan and participate in wildfire risk reduction and preparedness in their communities. More information on wildfire preparedness and precautions is available from the National Fire Protection Association, [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org), and at [www.ready.gov/wildfires](http://www.ready.gov/wildfires),

**About the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency:** TEMA's mission is to coordinate preparedness, response and recovery from man-made, natural and technological hazards in a professional and efficient manner in concert with our stakeholders. Follow TEMA on Facebook, [TNDisasterInfo](https://www.facebook.com/TNDisasterInfo), on Twitter, [@T E M A](https://twitter.com/T_E_M_A), and at [www.tnema.org](http://www.tnema.org).

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