



***Commonwealth of Virginia***  
***Office of Governor Bob McDonnell***

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**Governor McDonnell Announces Start of  
Virginia Spring Fire Season**

*~Citizens Should Not Burn Before 4 P.M.~*

**RICHMOND** – As Virginia prepares for the beginning of spring fire season which runs from Feb. 15 through April 30, Governor Bob McDonnell is warning Virginians that the threat of wildfires is increased this year due to Virginia's mild winter.

“Wildfires in the Commonwealth are very weather-dependent,” Governor McDonnell said. “When you combine the effects of the 2011 tornadoes and Hurricane Irene with the relatively mild and dry winter we’re experiencing, it adds up to a potentially dangerous spring wildfire season. That’s a life safety issue which could affect thousands of Virginians.”

Ninety-five percent of wildfires in the Commonwealth are caused by humans, so citizens need to help the Department of Forestry to reduce the risk of wildfires.

“The best thing people can do is to obey the law by not burning trash or debris before 4 p.m. each day during spring fire season,” Governor McDonnell said. “Virginia’s 4 p.m. law has been in place for almost 70 years and is one of the best tools we have for reducing the threat of wildfires. Because humidity levels typically increase and wind speeds usually decrease after 4 p.m., the likelihood of a fire escaping is reduced.”

The Department of Forestry offers additional fire safety tips including:

- Even if it’s after 4 p.m., don’t burn if the wind speed is in excess of 20 miles per hour and humidity levels are below 30 percent
- Burn in small piles rather than one big pile
- Before igniting your fire, clear the area around the pile down to bare dirt
- Don’t add to the fire after midnight
- Keep a fully charged hose and a shovel on hand to extinguish any spot fires that ignite away from the burn pile
- Dial 9-1-1 as soon as a fire escapes your control

According to State Forester of Virginia Carl Garrison, more than 40 percent of the 1,114 wildfires in Virginia last year were caused by people burning trash or debris. “These fires threatened the lives of thousands of Virginians and more than 4,000 homes and structures in 2011,” Garrison said.

Starting a fire before 4 p.m. during spring fire season is not only dangerous, it’s a Class 3 misdemeanor crime. It can also be very costly. In addition to a fine of not more than \$500, the person responsible for an escaping fire is financially liable for the cost of suppressing the fire and for damage caused to another’s property.

“A good-sized fire that escapes someone’s control can easily cost tens of thousands of dollars just in suppression efforts,” Garrison said. “If your fire burns down the neighbor’s home or barn, you could be liable for hundreds of thousands.”

The Department of Forestry will be using a new slogan this year to remind people about the 4 P.M. burn law. “Eager to Burn? Wait Your Turn” was developed by Neal Oberholtzer, a state area forester in Mecklenburg County, as a way to discourage people from burning before 4 p.m. The slogan will be featured on the Department of Forestry’s website as a click-through portal to information on wildland fires.

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 144,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide more than \$27.5 billion annually in benefits to the Commonwealth.

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