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Department of
Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Reminder: Permitted burning now suspended due to COVID-19

(Fairbanks, AK) – The Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF) reminds Alaskans that burn permits have been suspended as of midnight Thursday throughout most of the state, to reduce risk of human-caused wildfires.

Division officials are concerned the global COVID-19 pandemic will limit the number of wildland firefighting crews it could import this summer to help fight Alaska fires, many of which are originally ignited by human action, even permitted activity.

“It just bears repeating that even the smallest fires carry the potential to blow up into big fires, and with the pandemic we just can’t be sure we’ll have anywhere near the help in fighting fires in Alaska that we did last year,” said Division Director Chris Maisch.

The suspension bans the use of burn barrels, the burning of debris piles, and any other outdoor burning activity authorized under previously issued permits. Any person or business found to be violating this burn permit suspension order may be issued a citation to pay a fine or appear in court.

This statewide burn permit suspension will not include cooking, warming or signaling fires that are less than three feet in diameter with flame lengths no more than two feet high. It also will not include commercially manufactured outdoor cooking and heating devices with built-in open flame safety devices.

It also does not apply to the city of Cordova and points south, as the generally moist climate in Southeast Alaska puts it at less risk than other parts of the state.

Given the potential effects of COVID-19 on the upcoming fire season, Alaska’s wildland fire suppression agencies need the public’s help more than ever to keep firefighters and communities safe, Maisch said.

(MORE)

Burn suspension

Alaskans must do everything possible to prevent wildland fires, limit the spread of COVID-19, and protect firefighters and the public. The suspension of burn permits will help firefighting agencies mitigate some of the significant challenges they're likely to face this summer, including:

- An anticipated lack of firefighting resources available from the Lower 48 as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions and quarantine requirements
- The risk of exposing firefighters to higher risks of contracting and spreading COVID-19 when responding to human-caused nuisance fires
- Limited firefighting resources available to respond to higher-priority wildland fires which may place lives, property and infrastructure in imminent danger

The Division of Forestry will re-evaluate the burn suspension on a regular basis to determine if and when it is safe to rescind it.

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