



NEWS

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OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY
SOUTHWEST OREGON DISTRICT
5286 Table Rock RD
Central Point, OR 97502

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SOUTHWEST OREGON NEWS MEDIA

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CARELESS MOMENTS CAUSE COSTLY FIRES

Fire season is not the time to burn debris in burn barrels or to use power-driven equipment, such as brush cutters and chain saws, in areas of tall, dry grass. It is also not the time to discard lit cigarettes or drive vehicles onto dry grass. Yet all of these things are taking place nearly every day on lands in Jackson and Josephine counties that are protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry's Southwest Oregon District.

People cause 75 percent of all wildland fires on the district; the rest are caused by lightning. Power equipment-caused fires account for nearly one-third of all human-caused fires, and nearly half of these fires are caused by vehicles – automobiles, motorcycles or all-terrain vehicles. Chain saws, brush cutters and mowers are also included in this category. Also, escaped debris-burning fires cause 14 percent of the fires fought by district firefighters, and smoker-related fires account for 9 percent.

If a fire is human-caused, an investigation is conducted to determine whether suppression costs can be recovered from the responsible party.

On August 8, public “regulated use” restrictions took effect on ODF-protected lands – which include 1.8 million acres of state, private, county and Bureau of Land Management lands in the two-county area – prohibiting activities that cause most wildland fires. It is now illegal to:

- Use motorized vehicles off an improved road
- Smoke while traveling, unless in an enclosed vehicle
- Use fireworks
- Have open fires, except campfires in designated campgrounds
- Use chain saws
- Mow dry grass with power-driven equipment, except to harvest agriculture products (It’s also OK to mow a green lawn)
- Cut, grind or weld metal outdoors

Violating a regulated use restriction may result in a citation. Fines for regulated use violations range from \$94 to \$493. Should a fire occur, the person who caused it may get a ticket and a bill for suppression costs.

Fighting wildland fires is expensive. The cost of a routine response to a reported fire ranges from \$500 to \$1,500. If additional fire-fighting equipment is needed, the cost rapidly increases. A helicopter costs approximately \$2,000 for three hours of use, and each load of retardant dropped from a bomber costs \$10,000.

In just the past week in Josephine County, ODF firefighters responded to 32 reports of regulated use violations: seven reports of chain saw use, 14 reports of people mowing or operating other equipment in dry grass, six reports of people burning debris in burn barrels or piles, four reports of vehicles being operated off of improved roads, and one report of someone grinding and cutting metal in a fire hazard

area. Additionally, three fires occurred: one from equipment, one from debris burning and one from a campfire.

Being careless with fire is costly. However, all fires caused by carelessness are preventable.

For information about fire prevention and fire season regulations, contact the Oregon Department of Forestry at (541) 664-3328 in Central Point or at (541) 474-3152 in Grants Pass, or call your local fire protection district.

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