

Dry conditions: Officials urge safety with fire

OLYMPIA — Washington residents are urged to play it safe with fire to avoid human-caused wildfires.

Wildfire season is officially underway, with more than 130 fires to which the state Department of Natural Resources responded in April alone, said Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz and Gov. Jay Inslee. Unseasonably warm and dry conditions across Washington are increasing fire risk when residents burn yard debris and head outdoors for recreation.

"We all deserve a great summer after a year of isolation and hardship, but we won't get one if wildfires and

choking smoke keep us inside," said Franz, who leads the DNR and its wildfire firefighting force. "It only takes one spark to start a devastating wildfire.

"I'm asking everyone to help our firefighters protect our neighbors and forests from wildfire. Avoid lighting an outdoor fire if you can and, if you do, practice basic fire safety."

Since Jan. 1, DNR has responded to 214 fires, with 529 total acres burned. Leading causes are yard debris burn piles and unattended campfires.

"I encourage Washingtonians to take it outside and enjoy our state's scenic beauty," said Inslee. "Enjoying time outside is good for our mental and

physical health, especially after this past year. The outdoors are one of the safest places we can be because of the fresh air - but only if we work to keep it that way.

"As you plan your activities, take a moment to consider how to reduce the risk of unintentionally starting a fire by taking simple precautions. It is incumbent on all of us to protect our state's communities, firefighters and natural resources."

DNR provided some reminders:

- Douse campfires with water before leaving them. If a fire is still warm to the touch, it's not safe to leave.
- Never leave a burn pile unattended. Have a hose ready should the

fire escape.

- Never drag chains connecting a trailer to your car. Sparks can start a wildfire.

- Target shooting into areas with dry grass is never a good idea. Exploding targets are illegal on DNR-protected lands and should be used with extreme caution where allowed.

- Watch the weather. Windy conditions around a debris burn pile can cause nearby trees and grasses to catch fire and spread quickly.

- Play it safe. If there are any doubts about keeping a fire contained, whether it's a campfire or burn pile, don't light the fire.

Inslee: State enters fourth wave of COVID-19

OLYMPIA — Washington state has entered its fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gov. Jay Inslee said during a press conference Thursday, April 22.

"Unfortunately, we now are seeing the beginnings of a fourth surge in the State of Washington," Inslee said. "And we are starting unfortunately at a higher level than where the other waves started from."

Inslee urged residents to get vaccinated, wear masks and keep physical distance.

"We are seeing a rise in COVID-19 cases in Okanogan County," a statement from Okanogan County Public Health said. "Recent cases are coming from people traveling and gathering, and a decrease in mask wearing, especially in the workplace."

The agency urges people not to go to work if they have any cold or allergy symptoms, because these can also be symptoms of COVID-19.

"If you have symptoms, limit your contact with others, wear a mask and get tested for COVID-19," Public Health said. "We know what to do, Okanogan County - we got this. Let's mask up and take care of each other."

Cases also are on the rise in neighboring Ferry County.

"COVID-19 transmission has dramatically increased in Ferry and Stevens counties," said a statement from the Northeast Tri-County Health District. "In order to slow the spread, it is crucial that residents and visitors take necessary precautions and get vaccinated to protect themselves, family and friends."

"In the last two weeks, an event in Ferry County has demonstrated the danger of relaxing precautionary measures due to a gathering held in Republic," the Health District said. "Though new cases are still being reported, currently there are 71 cases involving attendees or their close contacts who have tested positive and four hospitalizations."

According to the health district, Ferry County picked up 63 new cases over the past 14 days, including 12 new cases reported April 22. The county incident rate (number of cases per 100,000 in a two-week period) was 810 as of Friday. Four deaths have been reported in Ferry County.

Okanogan blaze



AL CAMP | Special to The Chronicle

Omak Fire Chief Kevin Bowling applies a stream of water to a home burning the morning of April 20 on Cameron Lake Road. The fire burned for several hours, taking with it the home, outbuildings and fencing. No additional information was available at press time.

Officials warn warm weather brings out rattlesnakes



A rattler sticks out its tongue while sunning amid rocks and dried foliage.

NORM WILLIAMS | Special to The Chronicle

OKANOGAN — As the temperatures climb throughout central Washington, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest reminds residents that rattlesnakes are out and about.

"The northern Pacific rattlesnake is the only rattlesnake species found in the State of Washington," the agency said. "It's found only in the arid, rocky areas east of the Cascade Crest."

To survive the long eastern Washington winters, rattlesnakes hibernate from late September to mid-April, typically in rocky crevices or talus slopes.

They leave their winter dens in late April and early May and slowly travel to their summer habitats. They are most often encountered by humans when they are making the move between their winter den and summer home.

The number of segments on the rattle does not indicate the true age of the snake, since rattlesnakes lose portions of their rattles as they age.

Rattlesnake fangs are hollow and used to inject the snake's venom to stun or

kill their prey. Their fangs are shed and replaced several times during their active season. Fangs may also be lost by becoming embedded in prey, or be broken off by other means.

Officials say any potential rattlesnake bite should be evaluated in the emergency room as soon as possible.

A person who has been bitten should remain calm and call the Washington Poison Center at 800-222-1222 or call 911, the center advises. The offered some tips:

- Do not attempt to capture the snake. Taking a photograph may be helpful in identifying the snake, but should not be done if it puts someone at risk of another bite.
- Do not attempt to extract or remove venom from the bite.
- Do not apply tourniquets or ice packs to the bite site or affected limb.
- If possible, restrict movement of the affected limb.
- Remove any rings, jewelry or other items that may cause constriction if swelling occurs.

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