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## MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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### RETURN TO NEWSROOM

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## SPRING WILDFIRE SEASON SPARKS PREVENTION MESSAGE

### *Permits Required for Open Burning*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Moderate wildfire conditions this spring have prompted state forestry officials to remind the public to “think before you burn” by calling your local state Division of Forestry office.

Mid-February marks the traditional start of spring forest fire season in Tennessee according to state officials with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry. During official fire season, Oct. 15 through May 15, state law requires citizens to get a burning permit before conducting any open, outdoor burning.

“The burning permit system is a very important wildfire prevention tool that allows us to communicate with citizens about how, when and where it is safe to burn” said state forester Steve Scott. “By getting a burning permit, not only are you complying with the law, but you may be saving your own valuable property and possibly lives. It’s that important.”

Citizens can obtain a verbal burning permit by simply calling their local Division of Forestry office listed in the phone directory under state government between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Permits are generally good for 24 hours and can be issued for weekends. A directory of state forestry offices by county can be found on the Web at [www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/forestry](http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/forestry), click on Fire Information then Burning Permits.

Activities requiring a burning permit include, but are not limited to unconfined, outdoor burning of brush and leaves, untreated wood waste, and burning to clear land. Burning permits are required in all areas of the state unless superseded by local ordinance, so forestry officials suggest that you also check with your county or city government for any local burning restrictions.

Even under ideal weather conditions, state forestry officials say that following basic fire safety tips can mean the difference between a successful debris burn and tragedy. They recommend:

- Selecting a proper location away from steep slopes, forested or dry, uncut grassy areas
- Establishing a control line around your fire, down to bare dirt, before you burn
- Notifying neighbors as a common courtesy
- Having tools on hand such as a leaf rake and garden hose to control your fire
- Watching for changing weather conditions as winds can blow your fire in the wrong direction
- And, staying with your fire until it is completely out. It is illegal to leave an open fire

unattended.

Governor Phil Bredesen has recommended an improvement of more than \$4 million for new Forestry firefighting communications equipment in his proposed FY '08 budget that is now before the Tennessee General Assembly. Since 2005, the Division of Forestry has deployed 112 new bulldozers and transport trucks and 51 new pickup mounted pumps for improved safety and firefighting capability. The new firefighting equipment was funded through a \$20 million bond issue proposed by Governor Bredesen and supported by the Legislature.

So far this year, nearly 400 wildfires have burned an estimated 4,400 acres in Tennessee. Escaped debris burns are a leading cause of wildfire; however, 41 percent of the wildfires so far this year have been due to arson, which is class C felony punishable by three to 15 years in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine. Anyone with information about suspected arson activity should call the state Fire Marshal's Arson Hotline toll-free at **1-800-762-3017**.

During fire season, anyone burning without a permit is subject to a Class C misdemeanor punishable by up to 30 days in jail and/or a fine not to exceed \$50. For more information about burning permits, call your local state Division of Forestry office or visit online at [www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/forestry](http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/forestry) then click on Fire Information.

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