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RETURN TO NEWSROOM

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MEDIA RELEASE
 STATE OF TENNESSEE
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Fire Season, Dry Conditions Prompt Fire Safety Reminder

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Officials with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry are reminding citizens of permit requirements and fire safety precautions for outdoor burning. The fire prevention message coincides with national Fire Prevention Week, Oct. 7–13, and the official start of forest fire season in Tennessee beginning Oct. 15.

“Because of the extremely dry conditions going into what is normally our driest time of the year and the traditional start of fire season, it’s important that citizens call for a burning permit and follow fire safety recommendations for outdoor burning,” said state forester Steve Scott. “Many areas of the state are still too dry to allow burning, and the permit system helps us communicate to the public when and where it is safe to burn.”

The Division of Forestry implemented burning permit requirements seven weeks earlier than normal this year due to extremely dry conditions from the lingering drought. Since Aug. 27, the Division has issued more than 7,000 permits statewide, mostly following rain showers that made burning temporarily safe in some areas. Permits for the open, outdoor burning of leaves and wood debris are normally not required except during official fire season, Oct. 15 through May 15.

“By implementing the burning permit system early, we think we’ve had a major impact on reducing the number of escaped debris fires, which are a leading cause of wildfires,” said Scott. “The public is a very important partner in helping us reduce the number of wildfires by respecting state and local restrictions, always using common sense and by reporting suspicious activity that may be related to arson.”

According to state Forestry officials, burning permits are not likely to be issued in many areas of the state until substantial rainfall is received. When conditions improve, citizens should inquire about burning permits by 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. A directory of state Forestry Division offices by county and fire safety tips also can be found on the Web at www.burnsafetn.org.

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 most areas unless superseded by local ordinance, so citizens are encouraged to check for any restrictions by municipalities.

Since Jan. 1, more than 2,900 fires have burned an estimated 40,900 acres in Tennessee, well above average for what is normally seen in a 12-month period. Escaped debris burns are the leading cause of wildfire. However, 36 percent of the wildfires this year have been due to arson, which is a class C felony punishable by three to 15 years in prison and up to \$10,000 fines. Anyone with information about suspected arson activity should call the state Fire Marshal's Arson Hotline toll-free at 1-800-762-3017.

Burning without a permit is a Class C misdemeanor punishable by up to 30 days in jail and/or a fine not to exceed \$50. For more information, visit the Forestry Division's wildfire safety Web site at www.burnsafetn.org.

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