



Marion County Board of County Commissioners

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WEEKEND RAINFALL CRITICAL TO DIMINISH WILDFIRE THREAT

Immediate Release

MARION COUNTY, Fla. (May 27, 2011) –The Marion County Multi-Agency Wildland Task Force met Friday morning to discuss current weather conditions and wildfire hazards in Marion County. The average drought index, based on a scale of 0 to 800, is 602 in Marion County and any number above 500 is considered a wildfire danger zone.

Though Marion County is forecasted to receive some rainfall this weekend, dry areas must receive several days of significant rainfall to decrease wildfire threats. Wildland officials will monitor weather conditions throughout the weekend and will discuss next week if further burning precautions should be taken. Meanwhile, Marion County Fire Rescue is “dual-dispatching” units, meaning dispatchers will send double the amount of firefighting resources to wildfires and actively communicating with other agencies in the task force to request support. The idea: commit a large amount of resources to wildfires to keep them small.

Task force members are also concerned with the lightning strikes that can accompany rainfall. Even if some areas of the county receive rain, lightning can strike where no precipitation has fallen. Over the last few weeks, fire officials have also seen an increase in human related grass fires in Marion County. Activities such as mowing the lawn, burning yard debris or not properly disposing of a cigarette butt are all capable of causing a wildfire.

With the recent rise in human-related grass fires, firefighters urge citizens to follow these safety tips:

- Voluntarily delay any outside burning until Marion County receives significant rainfall over an extended period of time.
- Take yard debris to the Marion County Landfill or recycling centers, a safer alternative to backyard burning. Call Marion County Solid Waste at 352-671-8465 for more information.
- Immediately report arson or other suspicious activity to law enforcement.
- Use vehicle ashtrays instead of throwing cigarette butts out the window.
- Use caution when mowing or working with other equipment that could cause sparks.

The Marion County Multi-Agency Wildland Task Force formed shortly before the unprecedented 1998 wildfire season. Firefighters and other public safety professionals from local city, county, state and federal agencies meet on a routine basis to discuss wildfire conditions, call load, manpower capabilities, wildfire tactics and public education campaigns. While wildfires have devastated many Florida counties, Marion County has remained relatively wildfire free thanks, in part, to the cooperative efforts of the task force.

Though the task force cannot implement a mandatory burn ban, it can make recommendations to the Marion County Board of County Commissioners, which implemented mandatory burn bans in 2009, 2008 and 2007.

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