

County Commission Update: Prevent Wild Fires

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

With several large wild fires having already burned and continuing to burn around the state, claiming the life of one person and forcing evacuations of thousands of people and threatening thousands of homes and other structures, Tooele County officials are asking residents to exercise extreme caution when participating in activities with the potential for igniting fires.

Tooele County Commissioner Jerry Hurst said, "We're seeing extremely dry conditions right now. I was out in Skull Valley last week and there is no new growth, no green grasses underneath of last year's dry grasses and weeds. Add to that the hot and windy weather and conditions are right for wild fires. It's extremely dangerous."

So far Tooele County has already experienced at least three fires near DCD and SR-73 and one fire near Delle and I-80. And there have even been several small grass fires in the Tooele Valley. Those fires have burned hundreds of acres of land in Tooele County this year. Other fires are burning out of control around the state. Most of those fires were human-caused.

"With Independence Day and Pioneer Day approaching, people are gearing up to enjoy fireworks. Campers are beginning to get out into the hills and mountains, and target shooters and ATV riders are out as well. All these activities are at risk of starting wild fires," Commissioner Hurst said. Officials are encouraging all recreationalists to observe all campfire and fireworks restrictions and to exercise extreme caution in their activities.

Tooele County passed an ordinance stipulating that the use of explosive targets is illegal on public lands. Commissioner Hurst said, "I went to one store that was selling the devices. I was basically told that they're just like fireworks and that corporate will continue selling them. But after talking with the store management about the issue they eventually decided to pull the products from the shelves."

Utah Governor Gary Herbert recently signed a declaration outlining the severe conditions, fire dangers, costs of fire damage, and costs of fighting fires. In the declaration Governor Herbert wrote, "I encourage all residents of the State of Utah to reduce the risks of fire, abide by current restrictions, and take sensible and appropriate action."

All recreationalists need to be extremely careful with any type of fires and combustible items. Adult supervision should be in place at any activities involving potential fire dangers. Practice putting campfires out completely. Make sure you have shovels, buckets, fire extinguishers, and water to put out small fires. Instruct children not to play with matches. As always, in the event of a fire call 911.

Statewide statute stipulates that legal types of fireworks can only be used during the period beginning three days before and ending three days after each of the Independence Day and Pioneer Day holidays. Fireworks cannot be lit after 11:00 p.m. during those periods except on the holidays and then they

cannot be lit after midnight. It is illegal to possess or ignite fireworks on state and federal lands at any time.

Other fire restrictions on state, federal, and unincorporated private lands are:

1. Open fires of any kind, except campfires built within the facilities provided for them in improved campgrounds, picnic areas, or permanently improved places of habitation.
2. Smoking, except within an enclosed vehicle or building, a developed recreation site or while stopped in an area at least three feet in diameter that is barren or cleared to mineral soil.
3. Discharging or using any kind of fireworks, tracer ammunition or other pyrotechnic devices.

Grantsville Mayor Brent Marshall said, "People should use extreme caution when using fireworks. In Grantsville fireworks can only be used within the boundaries between Matthews Lane on the east and West Street on the west; and between Clark Street on the north and Durfee Street on the south. The exceptions would be the interiors of subdivisions outside of those boundaries."

Tooele City is only allowing fireworks within the area between Droubay Road and 1000 West, and 2000 North and Skyline Street. Fireworks are banned outside of that area. Tooele City residents living outside those boundaries are welcome to enjoy their personal fireworks at one of the city parks within the fireworks approved area.

Anyone caught using explosive targets on public lands, or using approved fireworks outside of approved times and places, or using any illegal fireworks face misdemeanor charges. If you witness someone engaged in any of these illegal activities, just make note of the license plate number and call law enforcement.

Tooele County is known for its great outdoor recreation opportunities. We want you and your family to enjoy the beauties of the county well into the future. It's up to all of us to be careful with our natural resources and to protect public and private lands and property. If you choose to participate in any activities that could start fires this summer, please be responsible and be careful.