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Spring Burning Can Lead to Wildfire

Salt Lake City, Utah – Fire officials are issuing a caution as warmer weather arrives. This Spring, dozens of yard, fenceline and debris burns have escaped, requiring action by fire fighters. The fires have occurred around the state from and they were all preventable. Fire management officers recommend some simple precautions before igniting to ensure fewer escaped fires.

- Notify your local fire department of your intention to burn; some departments may offer to put a fire engine on standby at your burn.
- Never burn on windy days. Check your local forecast, weather changes quickly in Utah.
- Clear away vegetation to create firebreaks between burn areas and adjacent fields, structures and trees.
- Before burning, establish control lines. Control lines should be even wider around brush and debris piles to be burned. The larger the pile, the wider the control line needed to ensure embers won't spread to surrounding vegetation.
- Keep a charged hose and a shovel nearby (if a hose isn't possible, 5-gallon water buckets).
- Stay with your burn; never leave the fire unattended, even briefly.

Notification of the nearest fire department before burning is required by law in ALL CASES (failure to do so is a Class B misdemeanor). Many of the costly and embarrassing experiences so far this year could have been avoided with a simple phone call. Preparation beforehand can make the difference between success and disaster. In addition to preparations, slow and gradual lighting of an area allows for greater control of a fire's pace.

Open burning is regulated on a state level by state law and rule. Most counties and cities also have ordinances, so, people wishing to burn fields, ditches and waste piles should determine whether it is legal to burn before lighting anything. The closed fire season begins June 1; until that date agricultural fires may be lit without a burn permit. Yard debris and slash piles are governed by stricter county and city laws, so the public should consult local ordinances.

It may not be widely known, but it is always the responsibility of the person lighting and tending the fire to take the needed precautions and prevent its escape. A permit or notification call does not relieve a person from liability if the fire gets away or damages someone else's property, so good judgment is advised. Fire suppression is expensive; therefore all escaped burns are investigated to recover costs.

If the fire gets away – then what?

Despite preparations, fire can still escape. If things begin to get out of hand, regardless of whether the fire is legal or not, it should be PUT OUT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. If it escapes control, do not put yourself or others at risk, call 911 immediately.

Burning is not the only option for getting rid of debris; in fact it is a source of air pollution. Many landfills have sites available for organic material disposal. Cities and counties restrict open burning to October through May; a permit is required in most cases after May 31.

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