



*Office of Emergency  
Management*

## **MONTEZUMA COUNTY, COLORADO**

# **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS NEWSLETTER**

July 1, 2010

Wildland fire season is upon us, and now is a good time to talk about what goes into enacting a fire ban.

There are stages to fire bans. Most typical is Stage One. This involves restrictions prohibiting open burning, campfires not confined to established fire pits, and agricultural burning. Workers are required to use chainsaws equipped with spark arresters. Smokers are warned not to smoke in areas where dry fuels are plentiful. Fireworks are prohibited.

In other words, a fire ban is a straightforward and sensible set of rules limiting the use of open flames.

But what goes into enacting a fire ban?

Because fire bans impose public restrictions, they are carefully weighed before being put into place.

The Forest Service pulls together national data and analyzes it using the Wildland Fire Assessment System (WFAS) to provide daily information for the BLM, National Park Service, State and local agencies. Historical data plays a key role in this analysis.

Sophisticated indexes measure such things as flammability potential of organic material in the soil; dead fuel moisture contents rated in order to determine how fast available fuels are drying out, thus allowing for predictions of how easily they may ignite. Live fuel moisture reviews allow

fire managers to predict not only how easily these can ignite, but also the way a wildland fire will behave. They can then plan accordingly in gathering fire fighting assets (crews and equipment) so that they can respond quickly to a wildland fire. The potential for lightning-caused fire ignition is measured by the National Weather Service.

Once this data is analyzed, it is compared to a set of ten standards. If at least six of the ten standards are met, then a fire restriction can be enacted. This recommendation is sent forward to the appropriate authority for consideration: county commissioners, sheriff, fire marshal or city manager. The recommendation may be to enact a ban for a set period of time, or in certain climate zones. Or it may be more extensive. In extreme cases, the recommendation may be to evacuate an area.

My point is this: a fire ban is not enacted in an unorganized, haphazard fashion. It is a carefully weighed decision based on the best information available.

You can do your part. Be safe with fire. Enjoy your fireworks on July 4<sup>th</sup> and after, but use them safely and wisely. To date in 2010, there have been 154 *human-caused* wildland fires in Colorado.

Be Prepared!

*Doug*