

Wildfire Prevention

Your flowers and grass know it, even the birds know it...we are dry, very dry.

The average amount of rainfall from Florida reporting stations was 0.54 inches in March, this is the driest March on record (3.13 inches below the average).

Five weeks went by between the end of February and the end of March without any rain and April was not much better.

The nation's weather experts blame a La Niña shift in rainfall patterns...a cooler Pacific Ocean that means less rain for Southern states and more for the nation's northern regions.

Many of us remember eight years ago when similarly dry conditions meant unprecedented, and seemingly unstoppable wildfires. There is plenty of kindling on the ground that could provide just the right fuel for a wildfire after the recent years' hurricanes and tornadoes.

Most fires are caused by carelessness.

Throwing lit cigarettes on the ground and out of moving car windows are putting all of us at risk. Please do not carelessly toss lit cigarettes...use an ashtray or douse them with water.

There is a burn ban in effect in Lake County now. With the lack of rainfall, it is very important everyone take steps to help.

Following are some ideas to safe guard your property against wildfires:

- Make it easy for fire trucks to get to your house.
- Clearly label your street name and house number with metal signs and posts.
- Make sure the driveway has a 16-foot clearance of vegetation, and create a 30-foot-wide space around your home for fire trucks to maneuver inside.
- Trim lower branches up to 10 feet on tall trees, remove vines from trees, and keep shrubbery away from pine trees so that a fire on the ground cannot climb up these fuel ladders to the treetops.
- Landscape your defensible space to make it difficult for fire to spread to your house. Use shrub islands or patches of perennials rather than continuous beds of plantings. Thin trees so branches do not touch each other.
- Keep combustible items like woodpiles, compost piles, gas grills, gas cans, and propane tanks at least 30 feet away from your house. Clear away dead vegetation, pine needles, and branches.

- Use mowed grass, gravel walkways, and mulched plantings near your home. Although mulch helps retain soil moisture, it must be kept moist or it can become a fuel source. Do not use thick combustible mulch beside your home's foundation.
- Keep large, leafy, hardwood trees in your yard, particularly on the east and west sides of your house. Their shade is important to cool your house, and the flat leaves trap moisture on the ground. Large pine trees also provide good shade. Trim lower branches and rake up pine needles.
- Remove flammable plants like saw palmetto, wax myrtle, yaupon holly, red cedar, and gallberry within 30 feet of your home. These shrubs are appropriate when planted farther from your home and in natural areas because they contain resins, oils, and waxes that burn readily. Many other plants are not as flammable, such as dogwood, viburnum, redbud, sycamore, magnolia, beautyberry, oaks, red maple, wild azalea, and sweetgum.