

*Commonwealth of Virginia*  
*Office of Governor Bob McDonnell*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Office of the Governor**

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**Governor McDonnell Warns Virginians of  
Increased Fire Danger**

*Extreme Temperatures, Lack of Rain Concern Virginia Forestry Officials*

**RICHMOND-** With virtually no rain for several weeks and temperatures regularly soaring above 95 degrees over an extended period of time, Governor Bob McDonnell warned Virginians today that conditions are ripe for wildfires across the Commonwealth.

“Typically, Virginia’s summer climate of high humidity and regular thunderstorms translates into green fields, grass, and trees and a lack of the kind of summer fire seasons experienced by many other states.” Governor McDonnell said. “But that’s simply not the case this year. The extremely hot temperatures combined with no real rain for several weeks have turned a lot of things brown, and that means the threat of fire has increased.”

The Governor has been keeping in close contact with officials at the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF) as the various wildland fire indices the department monitors continue to move into areas of the scales that are not usually seen outside of the normal spring and fall fire seasons. The drought index scale, which DOF uses to rank the likelihood of fire danger based on ground moisture, ranges from 0 – 800, where 0 equals total ground saturation and 800 is considered desert-like conditions.

“On the drought index scale, most of Virginia is in the 500+ range right now, and we should be closer to 200 during the summer months,” Governor McDonnell noted. “The chances of wildfires breaking out are much higher right now. Anyone using

machinery that can cause a spark, including lawn mowers and grain harvesting equipment, or be a source of intense heat, such as a vehicle exhaust system, must be aware of this threat. Something as seemingly benign as parking your car or truck on a patch of dry grass could result in a fire that burns hundreds of acres of field or forest. I urge all Virginians to be aware of the increased fire danger we currently face, and act accordingly to help prevent destructive and expensive wildfires.”

The Governor added that other activities, such as towing a trailer, welding, cooking at a camp site or playing with sparklers/fireworks, are just as likely to result in a wildfire at this time as burning debris/trash, which is the top cause of wildfires in Virginia.

State Forester Carl Garrison said, “While the drought index scale has not yet risen to the level at which the Department of Forestry will officially enact a burn ban, conditions are extremely dry and cities and counties across the Commonwealth are advised to closely watch local conditions and take any proactive measures they deem necessary. We will continue to monitor the situation and should a ban be necessary in the days or weeks ahead we will make that announcement at the appropriate time. At this time we encourage everyone to be aware of this danger and to keep water or an extinguisher handy if anything you are doing could ignite a wildfire. The life or property you are saving could be your own.”

As part of its law enforcement responsibilities, DOF is charged with determining the cause of any wildfire and ensuring the person responsible for starting the fire pays for the cost of suppressing it. Additionally, any damage done to the property of others is the responsibility of the person who started a wildfire. To learn more about Virginia’s wildfire laws, go to [www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov).

The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. Headquartered in Charlottesville, the department has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide service to citizens of the Commonwealth. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 144,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide more than \$27.5 billion annually in benefits to the Commonwealth.

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