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**Colleton residents urged to stay with yard fires as more property goes up in smoke**

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By HEATHER RUPPE

Wildfires continue to occur in Colleton County, with more property and homes being destroyed week after week. In most cases, the cause of these fires are unattended debris piles or trash piles.

So far this year, Colleton County firefighters have responded to more than 420 fires. These fires have occurred throughout the county, and have destroyed multiple homes, vehicles, sheds and acreage. Colleton County Fire-Rescue personnel and officials from the S.C. Forestry Commission are urging Colleton residents to stay with their burning debris – or to not burn at all.

According to the forestry commission, about 98 percent of all wildfires are caused by humans. Half of these are a direct result of debris burns that went rogue.

In South Carolina, there is a state law that requires all citizens to notify the S.C. Forestry Commission before burning outdoors. This requirement applies only to unincorporated areas of the state, meaning you live in the county and not within a municipality or town, like Walterboro or Edisto Beach.

According to the forestry commission, these are the state rules for burning yard debris:

Citizens burning residential yard debris must limit their fires to vegetative material like leaves, limbs and branches;

Citizens must clear a firebreak around the burning site;

Citizens should have the right equipment available to keep the fire under control and should stay with the fire until it is completely safe.

There are three types of outdoor burns for which the Forestry Commission takes notifications: residential yard debris burns, controlled burns and construction-related clearings or burns.

1. How to notify the Forestry Commission of residential yard debris burns

Colleton residents can call the Forestry Commission for their residential yard debris burns at 1-800-986-3599.

2. How to make notification for a prescribed burn

Citizens planning to conduct a prescribed burn must call 1-800-777-3473 and speak to a Forestry Commission dispatcher, who will walk them through the approval process. You will be asked to provide:

Name of person in charge of burn

Phone number of person in charge

CPFM number (if applicable) of person in charge

County in which burning is to be conducted

Specific location of your burn

Purpose of the burn

Acreage to be burned

Tons of available fuel per acre

Nearest smoke-sensitive area

Distance to smoke-sensitive area

The time you plan to start

3. How to make notification for a land clearing/construction burn

Colleton County residents should call 1-800-986-3599 to notify the Forestry Commission for their land clearing/construction burns.