

This public safety message is a collaborative effort of the Wakulla County Sheriff's Office and the Wakulla County Fire Department.

As we exit the Hurricane Season and begin the Winter Wildfire Season, conditions across the state remain extremely and unusually dry. The Panhandle is experiencing severe drought. It is important to remember that winter conditions bring low humidity and many times high winds. This is a dangerous combination that fuels fires as shown recently by the California Wildfires. Currently, weak La Niña conditions have developed in the eastern Pacific Ocean and are likely to persist and possibly intensify through the next three months. As a result, below normal rainfall is predicted to exist through the winter months and into the early spring. This shortage of rainfall will increase the rainfall deficit across the state and decrease the moisture available to the fuels through the winter months. Additionally, the potential for a freeze event will also elevate the risk for another severe wildfire season this spring.

As precipitation continues to be sporadic and unpredictable and cold fronts bring more drying conditions, we must continue to be vigilant in maintaining good wildfire prevention practices. Stay cautious yet focused when making a decision to burn. An informed decision is always a good decision. Therefore, if you must burn always call the Division of Forestry to confirm status, weather conditions and restrictions before you begin burning. (850)414-1871

- When burning yard debris in the proximity of swampy areas remember that these areas too have become very dry and should not be considered safe fire breaks against the spread of fire. It is imperative that homeowners stay present at all times with their fires and proactively address any spot overs into these swampy areas. Spot overs into these areas will very likely cause ignitions during this dry time.
- Sportsmen and outdoorsmen should make sure all warming fires are extinguished to the point that they are cool to the touch before moving out of the area. This will help prevent possible spot over fires into surrounding communities.

It is important that we continue to prepare for all hazards facing our region and our county. If you have not taken the time to develop a family preparedness plan, please go to WWW.floridadisaster.org for a specific planning guide. It only takes about 15 minutes to develop a detailed plan that will allow you to protect your family. Don't let your holiday season go up in smoke. For information on local efforts, please login to www.wcso.org.

Your Sheriff's Office and your Fire Department wish you a healthy, happy and Holy holiday season.