

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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4 PM BURN LAW BEGINS FEBRUARY 15TH

SUFFOLK, Virginia (February 12, 2009) The Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue's Fire Prevention Bureau will enforce Commonwealth's 4 p.m. Burning Law beginning February 15, 2009 – the start of spring fire season in Virginia. This law prohibits burning before 4 p.m. each day (Feb. 15 – April 30) if the fire is in, or within 300 feet of, woodland, brush land or fields containing dry grass or other flammable materials.

A violation of this law is a Class 3 misdemeanor punishable by up to a \$500 fine. In addition to the criminal violation, those who allow a fire to escape are liable for the cost of suppressing the fire as well as any damage caused to others' property.

Suffolk's Fire Marshall, Lieutenant James Dickens. Lieutenant Dickens advises that the leading cause of forest fires is carelessness. "An unattended fire, a discarded cigarette or a single match can ignite the dry fuels that are so prevalent in the early spring. Add a few days of dry, windy conditions and a simple yard debris fire can quickly turn into a raging inferno. The 4 PM burn Law is one of the most effective tools we have for the prevention of brush or forest fires. By adhering to the law and not burning before 4 p.m., people are less likely to start a fire that threatens them, their property or their neighbor's property."

The City of Suffolk Fire Prevention Bureau requires a burning permit for all open air burning within the city. Fire inspectors consider such factors as wind direction, proximity to other occupied dwellings, the resident's ability to control the fire, and history of complaints in a particular neighborhood before issuing a burning permit.

Lieutenant Dickens emphasizes that the issuance of a burn permit does not relieve one of any liability. A complaint lodged by a neighbor may result in the permit being revoked and the fire being extinguished by the fire department. If your debris fire gets out of control and damages adjoining property, you will be responsible for all damages as well as the expenses incurred in fighting the fire.

For more information on how to protect yourself and your property or to obtain a burn permit, contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 514-7540.

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