FIRE DANGER

Smokey Bear signs displaying the daily fire danger are often seen along major roads throughout Wisconsin. These ratings describe the potential for a fire to start and spread and the intensity at which a fire will burn in the wildland. Fire danger ratings are based on weather, fuels and changes in the landscape. The signs encourage the public to adapt their behavior and obey restrictions based on their knowledge of these fire danger levels.

LOW — Fires do not ignite easily and will spread slowly. **This is the safest time to burn.**

MODERATE — Fires can ignite and will spread, but are relatively easy to contain. **Use caution if burning.**

HIGH — Serious conditions. Fires ignite easily, spread rapidly and are difficult to control. **Burning is not recommended.**

VERY HIGH — Dangerous conditions. Fires start easily and spread rapidly with increased intensity. Fires are very difficult to control. **Burning is not recommended.**

EXTREME — Explosive conditions. Fires start easily, spread furiously and burn intensely. This is the worst possible danger. **Burning is strongly not recommended.**

SOLUTIONS

The good news is that fires can be prevented and it is possible to live, work and play safely in fire prone areas. By understanding the common causes of wildfires and recognizing when conditions are unsafe for burning outdoors, we can reduce the risk of a wildfire starting and spreading.

Be proactive. Know the daily fire danger and any local restrictions that may be in place before burning. Always consider alternatives to outdoor burning such as composting, recycling or chipping woody debris. When conditions are dry, hold off on operating hot equipment in grassy areas or using fireworks. Dispose hot ashes from your woodstove or fireplace in a metal bucket with a tight fitting lid instead of into the outdoors. Lastly, always have proper tools and water handy and never leave any fire unattended.

Consistent snow cover greatly reduces the likelihood that a fire will get out of control.

Today, risks and hazards of wildfire are easily identifiable and preventing wildfire disasters is a reality if people educate themselves on safe practices. **The key is to understand that fire is a tool and is to be respected and utilized responsibly.**

dnr.wi.gov (keyword "fire") ■ **1-888-wis-burn** (947-2876)

Surviving wildfire by adapting to it

Taking steps to live, work and recreate responsibly in places at risk to wildfire is necessary to protect lives, property and the beauty of our natural surroundings. We can adapt to living in Wisconsin's fire prone areas by preventing, preparing and planning for wildfires.

Preventing wildfires - understanding why and when wildfires occur and taking proactive measures to prevent human-caused wildfire disasters

Preparing for wildfires – *before* a wildfire occurs, learning what actions can be taken by homeowners, to help homes survive

Planning for wildfires - working together to develop a plan and take actions on the community level to reduce the impacts of a destructive wildfire

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Preventing WILDFIRES

Wildfires are inevitable and they can threaten homes, property, communities and even lives.

As people who live, work and play in Wisconsin, we all have an important role in preventing, preparing and planning for wildfire.

WILDFIRE Prevention

IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION

Every year, thousands of wildfires in Wisconsin are started as a result of careless use of fire in the outdoors. Since 98 percent of these fires are caused by humans, wildfire prevention aims to teach people about the dangers of accidentally igniting fires, with the expectation that safe burning practices will lead to fewer wildfires.

This is important because a wildfire in the wrong place can destroy homes and alter the landscape causing stress on wildlife and ruining the aesthetic beauty of our forests. Preventing wildfires also reduces the cost of firefighting efforts and economic losses associated with property damage, timber loss and large-scale evacuations.

Wildfires do not discriminate. Under the right conditions, a wildfire can happen to anyone who uses fire in the outdoors carelessly. And, any person responsible for setting fire to the land, either accidentally or intentionally, and allowing it to become a wildfire is liable for all suppression costs and potentially any damages.

$1,000 *The average cost of fighting a wildfire in Wisconsin is nearly $1,000 depending on the suppression resources used.*

Burning of leaves, brush, pine needles and trash, also known as 'debris burning,' is the No. 1 cause of wildfires in Wisconsin.

UNDERSTANDING FIRE

In order to prevent a wildfire from happening, it helps to understand how fires start and spread. Then, become more aware of the things around your home and property that may catch fire and cause damage to the things you value. The goal is to identify the risks and hazards *before* lighting your fire.

Every fire needs three things to start and burn: oxygen, heat and fuel. Oxygen is always in the air. Heat and fuel, on the other hand, are elements of fire that humans have the ability to control.

Heat comes from various human activities such as striking a match, operating hot equipment, burning debris, having a campfire, playing with fireworks or disposing of hot ashes from woodstoves or fireplaces.

Fuel in the wildland comes in the form of grass, leaves, pine needles, shrubs, trees, lawn furniture, firewood piles, buildings and campers—really, anything on your property that can burn. The transfer of heat to the fuel is what causes a wildfire to spread.

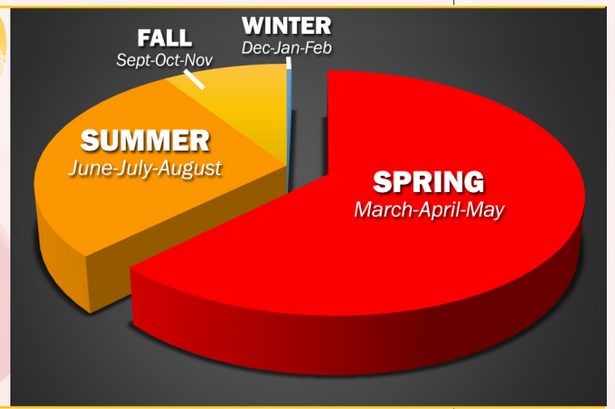
Debris burning is a common cause of wildfires and an example of how heat and fuel can be a deadly combination, if not used properly. Simple actions such as removing all flammables around the burn, keeping your fire small and manageable, having tools and water handy and making sure your fire is completely out before leaving can prevent your debris pile from escaping and causing a wildfire.

SEASONAL INFLUENCES

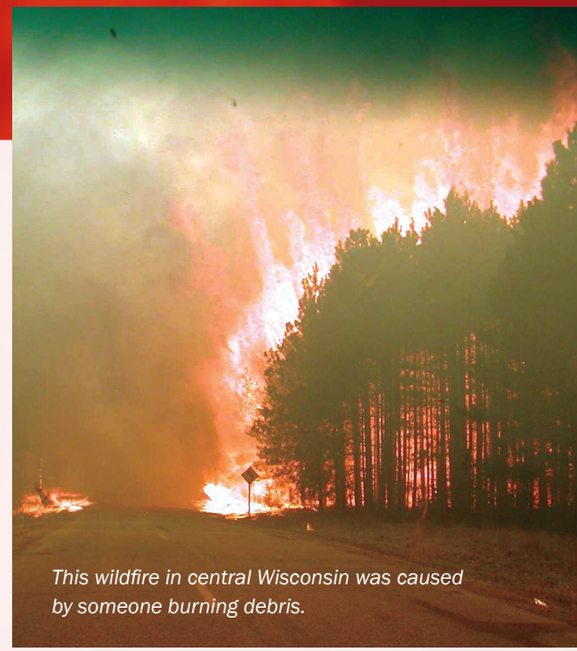
Weather is the single most important factor influencing how fires start and spread. Temperature, wind, humidity and precipitation are the key weather components that determine the daily fire danger. Wildfires can happen just about any time of year, but history has shown how changes in the landscape and seasonal trends greatly impact fire occurence.

Spring is the most critical fire season in Wisconsin. Shortly after the snow disappears a dry spring or even a few days in between rains, can leave grasses, pine needles and leaf litter very dry, creating hazardous conditions. Warmer temperatures, low humidity and windy days coupled with many landowners conducting spring clean-up around their property by burning yard waste leads to the majority of wildfires.

4,000 *On average, 4,000 wildfires occur in Wisconsin each year. The majority of them happen in the spring.*



In the summer months, when vegetation is green and humidity is elevated, wildfires do not spread as quickly. However, long-term seasonal drought due to a lack of rain can occur and fire occurrence can spike. A common trend is to see fireworks and hot equipment causing many wildfires under these conditions.



This wildfire in central Wisconsin was caused by someone burning debris.

Similar to spring, in the fall when the trees lose their leaves and the ground cover is made up of dry, dead and loose material, wildfires again can be problematic. This critical time period is typically shorter than the spring season, but leaf burning is a common practice in the fall and cooler temperatures lead to outdoor warming fires.

While the winter months typically bring snow, sometimes areas experience bare ground and with colder temperatures, many people use heat sources such as woodstoves or fireplaces. A common practice is to dispose of ashes in the wildland causing the unexpected wildfire. One might think the safest time to burn debris is when the ground is completely snow covered. While this is true in most cases, some debris fires can holdover and continue to burn for days, even weeks, long after the snow disappears. These fires can easily escape and ignite a wildfire.