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Local Fire Managers Urge Good Judgment to Prevent Wildfires

Cedar City, Utah – Fire officials are issuing a caution as hot and dry weather continues in southern Utah. This season alone, over a thousand acres of private and public land have burned as a result of wildfires ignited by metal cutting, metal grinding, outdoor welding, as well as illegal debris burning. "These fires are starting very easily and growing rapidly. People need to take into account that what they do may be a threat to the entire community and can have life changing consequences for not only the victims but the person who caused the fire also," explains Mike Melton, Southwest Fire Management Officer, State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands.

Fire management officers want to remind the public that fire restrictions are in place on all public lands and unincorporated state and private lands in **Washington County** - which includes the cutting, welding or grinding of metal in areas of dry vegetation. Melton adds, "We are seeing an alarming trend with these fires that are related to metal working. We included these activities into the fire restrictions to increase awareness." For detailed information regarding current fire restrictions visit www.utahfireinfo.gov.

Although these fire restrictions do not apply to incorporated towns and cities in Washington County, most cities have ordinances, so the public should consult their local fire department for information. If you live in an incorporated city or town, permission of the nearest fire department before burning is required BY LAW and failure to do so is a Class B misdemeanor.

In all unincorporated areas of Iron, Kane, Garfield, and Beaver Counties, aside from Washington County (given current fire restrictions), the closed fire season begins June 1 and lasts through October 31. People requesting to burn during these times must contact their County Fire Warden to obtain a Burn Permit. For local Fire Warden contact information please contact the State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands at 435-586-4408.

Fire management officers recommend that individuals take some simple precautions before using cutting, welding, or grinding tools or before igniting debris piles to ensure fewer escaped fires:

1. Contact your local fire department or county fire warden to obtain any necessary permits.
2. Never burn or use tools that have potential to produce sparks on windy days. Check your local forecast, weather changes quickly in Utah.
3. Clear away vegetation to create firebreaks between burn areas and adjacent fields, structures and trees.
4. Keep a charged hose and a shovel nearby (if a hose isn't possible, 5- gallon water buckets).
5. Before burning, cutting or grinding metal, or welding, establish control lines to ensure embers won't spread to surrounding.
6. Avoid spark and heat producing activities during the heat of the day. Fires start more easily and spread fast during the afternoon when the humidity is low, the temperature is high and the winds are gusty.

A permit or notification call does not relieve a person from liability if the fire gets away or damages someone else's property, so good judgment is advised. Fire suppression is expensive; you will be held liable for the cost of fighting any fire you start. Officials have been aggressively pursuing the individuals responsible for the ignition and spread of wildfires throughout the region.

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