

Burn ban helps keeps us safe during dry season

By Hector Flores

The Charlotte County Commission on Tuesday issued an emergency order banning outdoor burning (including yard waste and recreational fires) and the private use and discharge of fireworks and sparklers.

In requesting the order, Public Safety Director and Fire Chief Jason Fair cited numerous factors, including the statewide Keetch-Byram Drought Index, which determines forest fire potential. The index shows Charlotte County at a 550-590 on a scale of 800. The only county with a higher rating on the scale is Lee County, which also issued a burn ban on Tuesday. Collier and Hendry counties had burn bans already in effect.

Chief Fair also cited the county's Fire Danger Index, which has ranged from high to very high in recent days. The FDI estimates the potential for a fire to start and require suppression.

Another factor in the decision to ban burning was the National Weather Service's monthly drought outlook, which forecasts drought conditions to persist in Charlotte County and most of Southwest Florida throughout April.

Brush fires not only threaten lives and property, they strain emergency services resources both locally and regionally, Fair told the board. He added that the driest areas of the county, despite the recent rain in some areas, are the heavily populated, but still wooded, neighborhoods in the county.

Last week's brush fire in South Gulf Cove, which burned 43 acres and threatened numerous homes, was a perfect example. More than 50 personnel from Charlotte County Fire & EMS, Charlotte County Sheriff's Office, Englewood Area Fire Control District, Sarasota, North Port and Lee County fire departments and the Florida Forest Service responded to the fire. That figure doesn't include law enforcement officers providing traffic control in the area.

Thanks to the skill and dedication of our first responders, there was damage only to a shed, pool cage and fencing.

"To save the homes in West County and South Gulf Cove is amazing to me," Commission Chairman Bill Truex told Fair. "How you guys save houses — and the fire goes right between two — it just amazes me."

Even when it does rain, lightning strikes can ignite dry brush below the surface and smolder for days before spreading.

Everyone can play a role in keeping our community safe during this dangerous period. Abiding by the burn ban is key, but also critical is disposing of cigarette butts safely and not parking vehicles on dry grass. Report any smoke or flames immediately and heed evacuation orders when issued.

Stay safe and watch out for each other.

Job Fair

The Charlotte County Human Resources Department in partnership with CareerSource Southwest Florida has scheduled a job fair from 3-7 p.m., Monday, April 11 at the Charlotte Harbor Event & Conference Center, 75 Taylor St. in Punta Gorda.

This is a multi-agency event with employers from Charlotte County Public Works, Utilities, Building Construction Services, Recreation and Pools, Information Technology, Public Safety, Fire & EMS as well as the tax collector, schools and more. Potential on-site interviews and resume assistance will be available.

For information, contact Charlotte County Human Resources www.charlottecountyfl.gov/departments/human-resources. For all jobs available at Charlotte County, visit www.charlottecountyfl.gov/jobs.

Readers may reach County Administrator Hector Flores at Hector.Flores@CharlotteCountyFL.gov.