



For immediate Release  
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## St. Croix County Institutes **Red Flag** Day Burning Ban

**St. Croix County** - An agreement by county fire chiefs has led to a total countywide burning ban on those days when the National Weather Service (“NWS”) issues a Red Flag Warning for St. Croix County. County Emergency Support Services Director Stephen T’Kach announced the agreement, stating that Wisconsin fire chiefs have broad authority to fight fires and to do “whatever may reasonably be necessary in the performance of the officer’s duties while engaged in the work of extinguishing any fire or performing any duties incidental thereto,” including the ultimate authority for the issuance of burning bans. The burning ban shall exist for the duration of any Red Flag Warning issued by NWS; county dispatchers receive specific alerts from the NWS when all forms of weather alerts are issued, including the Red Flag Warnings. Because of the piecemeal nature of burning permits within the county, with nearly two dozen issuing authorities, it was not uncommon to have some areas that allowed burning, while others did not. “Worse yet,” T’Kach added, “there were both burning areas and no burning areas within some of the same fire districts.” The agreement was intended both as a public-safety measure and to reduce confusion on those days when a Red Flag Warning is issued. “Accidental fires raise enough problems on those critical Red Flag weather days,” he stated, “as they severely test the resources of local fire departments, so allowing permitted fires to the mix on such days seems counter-intuitive and only adds to the fire department burdens when those fires suddenly get out of control.”

T’Kach noted, “We are just entering our critical spring grass fire season and any dry spell will greatly increase conditions for fire dangers. With the snow mostly melted, the remaining combustible vegetation is now exposed and already in 2016 we have experienced a number of grass fires. Last weekend, the emergency center received over 100 calls from individuals with burning permits.” However, the bans will be very rare, as last year less than three Red Flag Warning days were declared for the county. The Red Flag Warning is issued by NWS when weather conditions of particular importance that may result in extreme burning conditions are present or anticipated within 24 hours of issuance. Red Flag criteria occurs whenever a geographical area has been in a dry spell for a week or two, or for a shorter period, if before spring green-up or after fall color, and the National Fire Danger Rating System is high to extreme and the following forecast weather parameters are forecasted to be met: 1) a sustained wind average 15 mph or greater, 2) relative humidity less than or equal to 25 percent, and 3) a temperature of greater than 75 degrees F. In some states, dry lightning and unstable air are criteria. Because Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources utilizes different fire and weather criteria, a Red Flag Warning day issued for Washington County, Minnesota, for example, may not apply to St. Croix County.

T’Kach advised that the Emergency Communications Center is formulating notification procedures for fire and municipal officials through its Code Red notification system when such a warning and burning ban is issued. He also advised residents to check with their local officials to determine whether burning permits are needed and to follow procedures for notification of emergency center staff, when required. And above all, he stressed, “Stay close to your fires and ensure they remain under control.”