

Burn Bans and Outdoor Burning Tips

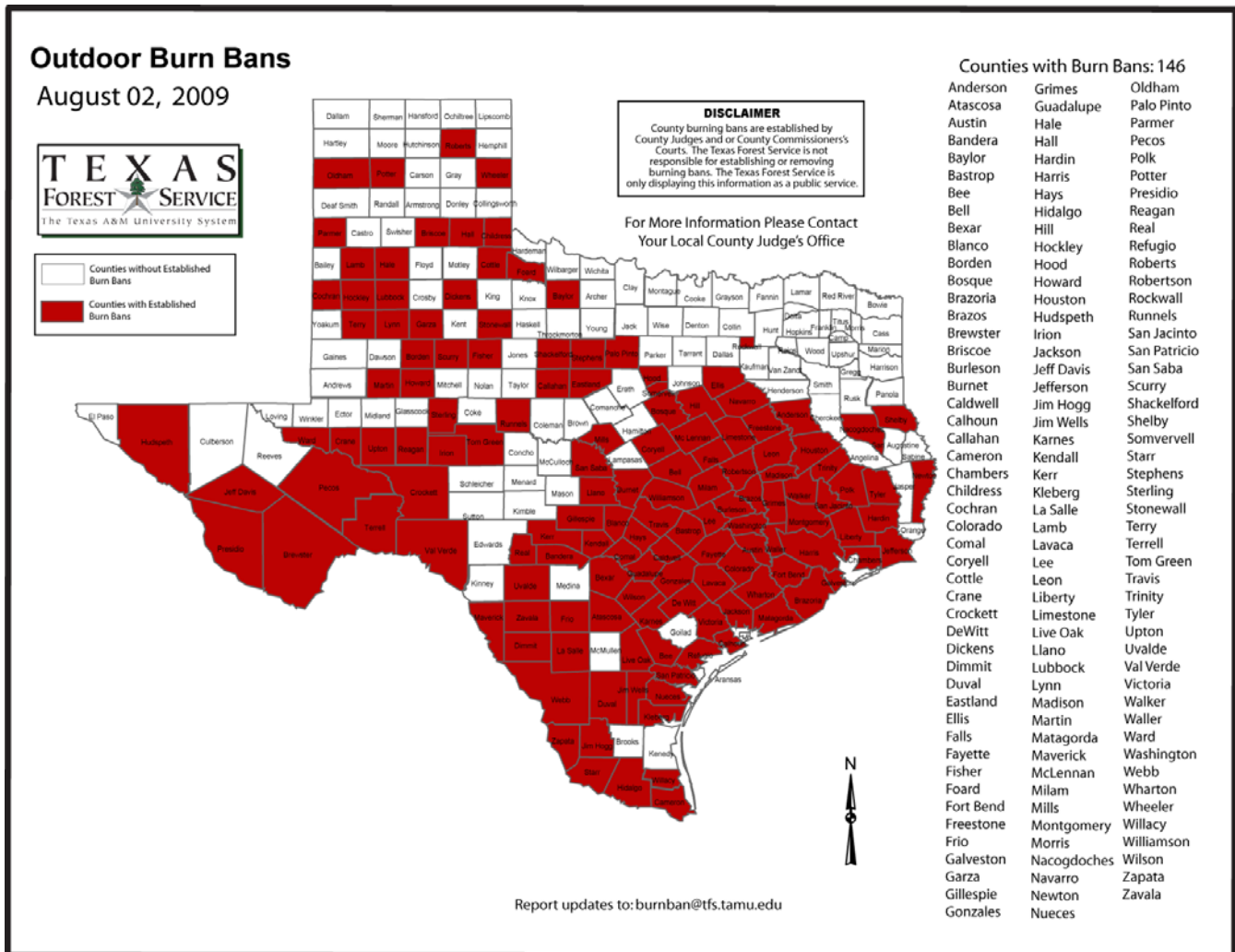
by Chris and Bron Clear

As most of you probably know, a great deal of Texas is experiencing dangerous woodland fire conditions this year. In fact, prior to March, 175 counties in Texas, including San Jacinto, were under a burn ban declaration, some of which continued into August. In Texas, burn bans are declared by the county judge and commissioners' court, which may restrict or prohibit outdoor burning. Although a county order can last only 90 days, the order can be continuously renewed to maintain the ban. Restrictions and enforcement varies from county to county.

The chief of our local CAVFD (recently created Cape Area VFD) advised that the current level of burn ban does not allow any open fires. However, burning garbage and vegetation refuse in a container is allowed, as well as using barbecue pits for cooking food. At this time, there is no restriction on welding. There are other exceptions dealing with Fire Department training and prescribed burns, etc., but for our neighborhood purposes, the above restrictions

are the most relevant. If you would like to learn more about burning in Texas, one of the best internet sites is <http://texasforests.tamu.edu>. In other, drier counties located north and west of us, the burn ban commonly restricts all outdoor fires even in barrels and also commonly restricts outdoor welding. If our conditions were to worsen, these types of restrictions could be put in place in San Jacinto County.

How do you know a burn ban is in effect? There are numerous places, including the headlines of the San Jacinto News Times and/or their website; the San Jacinto County website www.co.san-jacinto.tx.us; or call one of many resources, including the County Commissioners' offices, the county judge's office, or the Texas Forestry Service. In addition, our homeowners association and CAVFD worked together to produce a burn ban sign at Lakeview Estates Drive and Hwy. 156 when a ban is in effect.



If you see a violation that you think is endangering the neighborhood, but is not an imminent threat, you should try to discuss it with your neighbor to produce a remedy. If this is not feasible, then call 911 with a complaint and the fire department will respond. If the burning is inappropriate, the fire department personnel will ask the property owner to put it out themselves or allow the fire department to put it out. If they refuse, then a sheriff's deputy is called to intervene. The criminal offense of knowingly or intentionally violating the outdoor burning restriction is a Class C misdemeanor, which is punishable by a fine of up to \$500.

Firefighters across the state cite inadequate fire breaks (cleared areas surrounding a fire or burn barrel) and failure to stay with the outdoor fire to continuously monitor its behavior as the two most common reasons for escaped fires. Negligently allowing your fire to escape onto someone else's property is also a Class C misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$500, as well as you being responsible for incurred damage to their property or injuries sustained while fighting the fire. The party responsible for the burn remains responsible even when the burn is carried out in compliance with state and county regulations.

General Regulations & Requirements for Outdoor Burning

- Begin or continue burning only when wind direction and other weather conditions are such that smoke will not present a hazard to any public road.
- Begin burning no earlier than one hour after sunrise and end it the same day.
- Do not burn later than one hour before sunset.
- A responsible party is required to be present while the burn is active.
- Winds must be less than 23 miles per hour during outdoor burning.
- It is a violation of guidelines from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to burn electrical insulation, treated lumber, plastics, heavy oils, asphaltic materials, explosives, chemical wastes, or rubber items.

Outdoor burning fire safety tips:

- Call 911 immediately to report a dangerous, out-of-control fire.
- Exercise extreme caution.
- Do not burn on windy days.
- Clear all flammable debris from a significant area around the barrel or fire.
- Have ample water available in the burning area, i.e. charged water hose, fire extinguisher, bucket with water, 3 gallon garden sprayer, etc.
- Have ready access to shovels or rakes.
- Cover the barrel with a screen to prevent flying embers.

As environmental air quality concerns become more prevalent in Texas, there are additional considerations that might come into effect in relation to outdoor burning, which are being administered by the TCEQ. The purpose of this group is to protect the environment, promote public health and safety, and avoid nuisance conditions caused by outdoor burning. By these restrictions, if your smoke is drifting onto a neighbor's property such that they feel their air quality is detrimental, they can report you and "force?" you to stop burning. There are cases where this could be important, for example if a neighbor's family has significant asthma or allergy problems, then smoke is a health problem. Cape Royale's debris burn area was shutdown about 5 years ago due to a neighbor's complaint.

Many places in Texas no longer allow the burning of wood and garden clippings. We are fortunate in many ways in Lakeview Estates that we are still allowed to clear debris and trash this way. It is a privilege, which should not be abused by causing a dangerous situation. More than 20 years ago, some members cleared their own land and at the same time, were able to identify and save many native trees, which would have been overlooked by a bull dozer. We are a small HOA and smoke or burn related problems should be able to be worked out with common sense and civil conversation. Please be considerate whenever you burn so that you don't create problems for those around you. Campfires and smores are a neighborhood tradition.

Burning is not always the best option. Some debris can be used as mulch or compost, thereby eliminating the need for burning and at the same time, provide micronutrients for your plants. It is ironic that one man's trash is another man's treasure. Many composting companies have popped up over the last few years. They charge for dumping, then shred and compost the debris into "black gold", which they sell. Smart and profitable.

Since the LEPOA annual meeting, the CAVFD tried to blow out the dry hydrant located at the Boat Ramp Park. However, it had been silted in over the years. After learning of this dilemma, Michael Smith and Chris Echols were able to dislodge the drainage pipe from the silt, take measurements, and secure the suction pipe 2 feet above the lake bottom. It appears that it once again meets all the dry hydrant specifications, although the driveway still needs work.

Additionally, we were previously told that the flush valves on the water lines located on Lakeview Estates Dr. could not be used by CAVFD, because they were not allowed to practice with them. However, the City of Coldspring has recently received permission for the VFD to utilize the flush valves inside the city limits. Therefore, our flush valves may be available in the future.

While accidents do occur, many can be prevented with just an ounce of precaution.