

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Forest Service Warns: Keep Fireworks from Starting Wildfires**

LINCOLN, Neb.—Our nation's birthday is a time of celebration—picnics, ball games and fireworks. As fireworks sales begin across the state, it's a good time to review wildland fire safety measures. After all, fireworks routinely cause wildfires. Just one careless, stray spark can burn thousands of acres and cause needless injuries. Last year, fireworks caused 57 fires in Nebraska, which resulted in \$285,365 in losses, according to statistics provided by the Nebraska State Fire Marshal's office.

"We want Nebraskans to keep their Independence Day celebrations both memorable and safe by following basic fire safety precautions," said Mike Morgan, wildland fire prevention associate with the Nebraska Forest Service. "The largest number of outdoor fires associated with fireworks involve grass and brush fires. Combine that with the dry conditions in Nebraska during the summer and you create suitable conditions for wildland fires."

Even though recent rains helped some areas of Nebraska return to a normal wildfire season, others continue to experience increased fire danger. Since wildfire season began in mid-April, Nebraska has declared extreme fire danger alerts during 43 percent of that period.

In addition, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that in 2011 fires started by fireworks caused an estimated \$32 million in direct property damage. During 2007-2011, the largest numbers of outdoor fires associated with fireworks involved grass fires (6,800 per year), brush fires (4,500), dumpster fires (1,700), unclassified or unknown-type natural or vegetation fires (1,300) and other outside trash, rubbish, or waste fires (1,200).

#### Tips for Enjoying Fireworks Displays

Fire safety experts contend that the safest way to enjoy fireworks is to attend a public fireworks show put on by professionals. Stay at least 500 feet away from the show. If you are lighting fireworks at home, follow these safety steps:

- Never give fireworks to small children, and always follow package instructions.
- Keep a supply of water close by as a precaution.
- Make sure the person lighting fireworks always wears eye protection.
- Light only one firework at a time and never attempt to relight "a dud."
- Store fireworks in a cool, dry place away from children and pets.
- Never throw or point a firework toward people, animals, vehicles, structures or flammable materials.
- Leave any area immediately where untrained amateurs are using fireworks.

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Other common ways people often unintentionally start a wildfire

- leaving burning leaves or other debris unattended
- sparks from equipment such as lawnmowers, ATVs, power equipment
- smoking
- unattended campfires
- carelessly discarding ashes from a fireplace or grill

For more information about wildland fire safety, contact the Nebraska Forest Service at (402) 472-2944, or check online at <http://nfs.unl.edu/fire-prevention>.

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