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DEC Announces Residential Brush Burning Prohibited in New York State March 16 Through May 14

Annual Burn Ban Has Decreased Spring Wildfires 42.6 Percent Since 2009

Ban Reduces Wildfire Risks, Protects Lives and Property

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos today announced a statewide ban prohibiting residential brush burning will begin March 16 and run through May 14. With spring approaching, DEC is reminding residents that conditions for wildfires are heightened in springtime when most wildfires occur.

"While many associate wildfires with the western United States, the start of spring weather and the potential for dry conditions increase the risk for wildfires in New York," Commissioner Seggos said. "To protect our communities and natural resources, New York prohibits residential burning during the high-risk fire season to reduce the potential for wildfires. The burn ban has effectively reduced the number of wildfires over the last decade, and we're encouraging New Yorkers to put safety first."

Even though areas of the state remain blanketed in snow, warming temperatures can quickly cause wildfire conditions to arise. DEC will post a Fire Danger Map rating forecast daily for the 2020 fire season and the NY Fishing, Hunting & Wildlife App, on [DEC's website](#). Currently, fire conditions in most of the state are low risk.

Open burning of debris is the largest single cause of spring wildfires in New York State. When temperatures are warmer and the past fall's debris and leaves dry out, wildfires can start and spread easily and be further fueled by winds and a lack of green vegetation.

Every spring as the snow melts and vegetation dries out, New York's partnering local responders all too often have to leave their jobs and families to respond to wildfires caused by illegal spring debris fires. DEC Forest Rangers respond to and assist local agencies with the larger and more remote fires. Complying with the burn ban prevents unnecessary burdens on and dangers to state resources and local responders.

New York first enacted strict restrictions on open burning in 2009 to help prevent wildfires and reduce air pollution. The regulations allow residential brush fires in towns with fewer than 20,000 residents during most of the year, but prohibit such burning in spring when most wildfires occur. Since the ban was established, the eight-year annual average number of spring fires decreased by 42.6 percent, from 2,649 in 2009, to 1,521 in 2018.

Campfires using charcoal or untreated wood are allowed, but people should never leave such fires unattended and must extinguish them. Burning garbage or leaves is prohibited year-round. For more information about fire safety and prevention, go to [DEC's FIREWISE New York](#)

[website](#).

Some towns, primarily in and around the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, are designated "fire towns." Open burning is prohibited year-round in these municipalities unless an individual or group has a permit from DEC. To find out whether a municipality is designated a "fire town" or to obtain a permit, contact the appropriate DEC regional office. [A list of regional offices](#) is available on DEC's website.

Forest Rangers, DEC Environmental Conservation Police Officers (ECOs), and local authorities will be enforcing the burn ban. Violators of the state's open burning regulation are subject to both criminal and civil enforcement actions, with a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offense. To report environmental law violations call 1-800-TIPP DEC (1-800-847-7332), or report online on DEC's website.

DEC's Forest Rangers prepare in a variety of ways for wildland fire response. Last June, DEC and the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) [conducted a multi-agency tabletop training exercise](#) on Long Island that helped prepare local, state, and federal agencies for a rapid response in the event of a fire in the Central Pine Barrens, the expansive 100,000-acre ecosystem that is Long Island's largest natural area. Prescribed fire is also a tool regularly used to manage fire-dependent ecosystems like the Pine Barrens and the Albany Pine Bush Preserve in a manner that develops a resilient natural balance of fire in the desired vegetation.