

## 2007 – 2008 BRUSH FIRE SEASON

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The months of December and January may very well be the season to be jolly with the holidays, but it is also the start of a season that could bring fire to your doorstep. September through March, carry a special meaning to the Firefighters and Paramedics of Charlotte County. This time of year marks the first part of brush fire season. What does this mean to the public and why should residents of our community be concerned? What are the factors that contribute to a brushfire that can endanger our property and possibly our life? Can the public play a part in controlling the factors that contribute to brush fires? These are questions that deserve answers and Charlotte County Fire & EMS strives to provide the answers to these questions for the people of our community with the hope of not only educating, but of preventing damage to life and property.

There are a couple of factors that contribute to the making of a brushfire. Brushfires can ignite for a number of reasons. Lightning strikes, smoking, debris burning, equipment, campfires and arson can contribute to the start of a brush fire.

How a brushfire starts is only the beginning. Mother Nature contributes her factors such as humidity, temperature, wind speed, wind direction along with fuel density and fuel moisture. The lack of summer rains has not helped our situation this year. The Florida Division of Forestry released information stating that much of the State of Florida, still remains below the average rain fall for this time of year and Forestry is predicting the potential and probability for an active fire season in 2007-2008 In fact, according to a study done by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services on October 5, 2007, southern Florida is still showing severe drought conditions. The study's Long Range Outlook study states:

Weak La Niña conditions are developing in the eastern Pacific Ocean and are likely to persist and possibly intensify through the next 3 months, according to the NOAA Climate Prediction Center. As a result, below normal rainfall is predicted to exist through the winter months and into the early spring months. Thereafter, normal rainfall is expected into the summer months. This below normal rainfall will increase the rainfall deficit across the state and decrease the moisture available to the fuels through the winter months. The potential for a freeze event will also elevate the risk for another severe wildfire season this spring.

Residents can help protect themselves against brushfires by playing an active part in fire prevention and reducing the fire fuel sources in yards, on roofs and gutters and on neighboring properties. Brush fires tend to start without any warning and sometimes spread rapidly. Residents paying special attention to the

surrounding areas of their homes can reduce the risk of fire damage. Picking up yard trash, such as leaves, branches, and debris will eliminate a fuel source. These unnecessary combustibles can burn out of control and spread to structures, Trimming trees and eliminating branches that hang down onto the ground and on roofs also reduces the risk of a fire spreading. Firefighters advise residents to keep vegetation at least 30 feet from the eaves of their home. This is not always possible when residing next to a vacant lot owned by someone other than you. Eliminating excess foliage and debris will help your local firefighter gain access to your property much easier should there be a need for fire fighting equipment to enter onto your property.

New homebuyers can make wise decisions by choosing fire resistant or non-combustible materials for the exterior and roof of a new home. Wood used on the exterior of a home can also be treated with UL-approved fire-retardant chemicals. Homeowners can add protection by landscaping with “fuel breaks”, for example, gravel walkways, stone landscaping and driveways that will break the pathway for fire. Trees and shrubs which are fire resistant are good choices when planning landscaping for the home. Hardwood trees burn much slower than pines and palmettos.

Should a brushfire break out in your area, there are a few important tips to remember. Stay informed by listening to television and radio reports. Sometimes evacuation of a neighborhood is necessary. Life comes before property, so don't delay evacuating orders and waste precious time by gathering unnecessary items. Pack your supply kit ahead of time and include medications, important documents and other items that you need in case you can not return to your home immediately, or if your home sustains damaged. It is important that you know your area and at least two routes out of your neighborhood. Roads may be blocked by fire, smoke, firefighters and their equipment. Switch the head lights to the “on position” in your vehicle, this will assist other cars and pedestrians to see you if the area is smoky.

Charlotte County Fire & EMS is proudly reports that no homes were lost last brush season due to brushfires.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Charlotte County Fire & EMS at 833-5610, and have a safe and happy holiday.