

TEXAS BURN BANS: STRIVING TO PREVENT WILDFIRES



Anyone who lives near Possum Kingdom Lake or one of the many other areas across Texas devastated by recent wildfires can tell you about the danger posed by the ongoing drought. According to the Texas Forest Service, during 2011, 28,371 wildfires burned nearly 4 million acres around the state. Though more than 38,000 homes that were threatened by wildfire were saved, 2,887 were lost. An additional 2,204 outbuilding were also destroyed.

In an effort to protect the lives and property of Texans, most of the state's 254 counties had declared burn bans in 2011 including every county in the Brazos River basin. However, with recent rains, some Texas counties have begun to revoke bans. To prevent a replay of last year, residents will again need to be mindful of the need for safety as well as if their local governments allow outside burning or if

a burn ban is currently in effect for their area. For anyone who wonders what a burn ban is, when it can be called and what activities are prohibited, here is a primer.

Texas state law, in the Texas Local Government Code, allows county governments to ban outdoor burning in unincorporated areas, meaning outside city limits, if the Texas Forest Service finds there is an increased wildfire danger due to severe drought conditions. County commissioners can restrict burning in all or part of their county for up to 90 days or until drought conditions approve. After 90 days, if the drought persists, the county can renew the burn ban.



The state law allows counties to restrict outdoor burning in general or the burning of particular substances. This can vary from county to county. For instance, one county in the upper Brazos River basin specifically mentions discarding of cigarettes as a violation. Another in the central basin encompasses outdoor burning of a range of items, including in enclosed barrels; and open grills, barbecue pits and smokers.

The state allows certain types of burning to continue, including for firefighter training; for public utilities, natural gas pipelines or mining operations; and for planting or harvesting crops. Also allowed are fires conducted by a state-certified burn manager. A burn ban violation can be prosecuted as a Class "C" misdemeanor.



Possum Kingdom Lake

With the public's safety in mind, campfires are not allowed in parks at Brazos River Authority operated lakes when the surrounding county is under a burn ban. Lakes Possum Kingdom, Granbury and Limestone are in counties with current burn bans. However, visitors may still use barbecue grills at these lakes.

To see if your county is under a burn ban, click [here](#). For more information about state laws governing county burn bans, please click [here](#).