

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



San Mateo & Santa Cruz Unit

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CAL FIRE Cautions Public on the Use of Fire During Summer Conditions

Felton - This year (2020) has been a challenging year for the state, not only due to COVID 19 related issues but also fire conditions. The year started out with February being the driest month since the 1850's in California, warming temperatures and winds quickly dried out the annual grass crop. Recently, in San Mateo and Santa Cruz, a heavy marine layer has appeared to create better conditions and the public appears to be under the impression that fuel conditions are like they would be during spring.

Unfortunately, that is not a correct interpretation of fire conditions. Some of the fine fuels (grass, needles) are damp, but, a day of dry conditions with high winds (such as this past Monday) dries up these fuels so that fires can easily escape control. The larger fuels are still dry as they are not affected by short term weather conditions and we accumulated less than 50% of average annual rainfall this year.

So far this year, CAL FIRE has responded to over 4,772 fires burning over 94,505 acres compared to 2019 at this time where we had 2,851 fires for 23,856 acres. Locally, we have been frequently responding to pile burn and warming fire escapes, where the person responsible had neither a permit to burn nor had taken adequate protection measures to prevent the fire escaping. This has resulted in some enforcement action taken against the responsible parties.

CAL FIRE cautions the public that open burning at this time of year might not be their best decision. While campfires and ceremonial fires might be legal at this time, if the fire escapes control the person responsible is both criminally and civilly liable. Please follow the fire safety guidelines such as clearing to bare mineral soil around the fire, having a responsible adult attending the fire at all times and having appropriate suppression tools at the fire including adequate water.

“The last few years saw devastating reminders that the public cannot let their guard down. Together, we must continue to adapt and evolve to be able to withstand the intensity of these fires, keeping in mind that the only way to mitigate the damage they cause is through prevention and preparation,” said Chief Thom Porter, CAL FIRE director. “The potential is great for the dry, hot weather that fueled the massive fires over the last few years will return again this year, so it is up to the public to be ready.”

CAL FIRE is also asking residents to take that extra time to ensure that they are prepared for wildfires by maintaining a minimum of 100 feet of Defensible Space around every home and building on their property and being prepared to evacuate if the time comes.

For additional information on how to create Defensible Space, on how to be prepared for wildfires, as well as tips to prevent wildfires, visit [readyforwildfire.org](https://www.readyforwildfire.org).

