

Health Advisory, Safety Tips Issued During Flint Hills Burning Season

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) reminds Kansans that March and April are the months when large areas of the state's Flint Hills rangeland are burned. These burns help preserve the tallgrass prairie, control invasive species, reduce woody encroachment from species such as Eastern Red Cedar and Sumac and provide better forage for cattle. Prescribed burning minimizes risk of wildfires and is effective in managing rangeland resources. Smoke from the burns can influence the air quality of downwind areas. The use of smoke management techniques is vital to reduce air quality and health impacts.

KDHE will activate the [Kansas smoke modeling tool](#) on March 1, prior to widespread burning in the Flint Hills. The computer models use fire data and current weather conditions to predict the potential contribution of smoke to downwind air quality problems. There are approximately 2.2 million acres burned on average in the Flint Hills of Kansas and Oklahoma each year.

“For the twelfth-consecutive year, we are proud to have the opportunity to provide this important tool for the prescribed fire community,” said Douglas Watson, meteorologist at the KDHE Bureau of Air. “We continue to encourage ranchers and land managers to take advantage of this smoke modeling resource to spread out their burns more effectively and mitigate potential air quality impacts.”

Prescribed burns release large amounts of particulate matter and other pollutants that can form ozone. Particulate matter and ozone can cause health problems, even in healthy individuals. Common health problems include burning eyes, runny nose, coughing and illnesses such as bronchitis. Individuals with respiratory issues, pre-existing heart or lung diseases, children and elderly are more vulnerable to experience symptoms.

Steps to protect your health on days when smoke is present in your community include:

- Healthy people should limit or avoid strenuous outdoor exercise.
- More vulnerable people should remain indoors.
- Help keep indoor air clean by closing doors and windows and running air conditioners with air filters.
- Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water.
- Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath or severe fatigue.

For more information about the burning in the Flint Hills, the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan, the April burn restrictions and the smoke modeling tool, please visit <http://www.ksfire.org>

<https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=150>