

# Help Stamp Out Wildfires In Your Spring Cleanup

Forest fires raging out of control. Wildfires are an awesome and terrifying sight. They have aroused fear in the hearts of men from earliest times. The damage they do is appalling.

Forest wildfires spoil natural beauty and lower the quality of our environment by destroying countless graceful trees, spoiling lovely scenic vistas, and adding to the pollution of the countryside. They make forest recreation areas, roads, streams, and trails less attractive to campers and picnickers, and to boating, swimming, hiking, and skiing enthusiasts.

They contribute to serious erosion and floods which waste the richness of the earth. With no bed of leaves and mulch to absorb rainfall, the water runs quickly over the bare ground; soil and ash is then washed into streams, rivers, lakes and community reservoirs, killing many fish. As lakes and reservoirs fill up with silt they hold less water. In some cases reservoirs fill up with silt in a few years making them useless for community water supplies. When rains are heavy in burned over areas, rivers fill quickly and banks overflow. Damage to communities and farmlands downstream is often severe and many times the nation shares in the cost of rehabilitation.

Raging wildfires can be very

damaging to wild animals and birds.

Forest wildfires destroy vast amounts of valuable timber. This timber is needed to build our furniture, to supply us with paper of all kinds, from grocery bags to newspapers to stationery to facial tissues, and for many other products for home and industry. A single wild fire in Oregon in 1933 destroyed more timber than was harvested in the entire country for a whole year. Wildfires kill the young trees, the timber for tomorrow. They often change a forest of valuable trees into a forest of inferior trees, or weed trees.

Repeated fires often prevent a new forest from starting, leaving large black, scarred, barren areas which must be planted by man at great cost. In the U.S. in 1969 there were 100,000 wildfires that burned 6.7 million acres. That is about 10,500 square miles, or an area as large as the State of Maryland, or New Jersey and Delaware combined.

This wasteful burning goes on every year. What can we do about it? The best way to keep forest fire damage low is to keep fires from getting started. How do we keep forest fires from getting started? First, let's see how fires get started and then what is being done about them, and finally what can each one of us do to prevent them.

There are two basic sources of forest wildfires, as a matter of fact, of all fires. One is nature, usually by lightning. Second is man. In this part of the country, especially Southeastern Pennsylvania, lightning is a relatively insignificant source of wildfire. However, number two, or man, of which we are very personally familiar, starts nine out of ten of our forest fires. He starts them intentionally and accidentally.

There are different acts of starting fires. Let us examine these acts. One is incendiary or those that are deliberately set to burn and spreads to the property of others. More wildfires were due to this cause than any other, sad to say, in the State of Pennsylvania in 1971. Some people are ignorant to the fact that setting fires intentionally does man harm. However, it still continues.

Another act is smoking. Careless smokers set fire to approximately 350,000 square miles of forests every year. Campfires started by campers, hikers, hunters, fishermen and others that use the forests and great outdoors for recreation can very easily eliminate the area in which they wish to recreate, if they are not careful.

Equipment users - These are fires started by man through use of his equipment, such as trucks, cars, farm machinery, logging equipment, or mini-bikes. These things start fires like man and his carelessness.

A very important cause of fires started by man is the debris burner. This was the second major cause of fires in Southeastern Pennsylvania in 1971. The debris burner is a person trying to get rid of all the material they have stored over the winter and accumulated trash. They take it all out to the rear of the house, put it in a barrel without a cover, light the fire, and forget it.

How can we prevent fires? Since man is the cause of most

wildfires, everyone of us has a part in preventing them. We can be more careful ourselves and we can influence others to use more care with fire. Debris burning, as mentioned before, is something many of us do and can be more careful about. Some rules for debris burning are:

Never burn trash outside in dry weather or on windy days.

Always have plenty of available help, tools and water nearby.

Don't burn debris near buildings, woods, fields, or dry grass.

Burn only on bare ground or in a metal container. Clear everything away down to bare ground for ten feet in all directions before burning.

It is usually safer to burn late in the day. You should always check first to see if your local or State laws require a permit to burn brush, debris, etc., and get a

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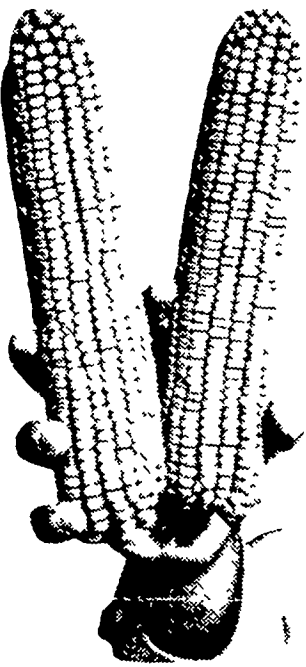
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