

## **Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan: The perspective from the city of Wichita**

The Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan is entering its second year in 2012. This comprehensive plan is designed to minimize the movement of concentrated smoke plumes into large metropolitan areas through voluntary participation. All Flint Hills landowners and managers who conduct prescribed burns should know what is in this plan.

To help educate all those affected, a series of radio interviews is being broadcast weekly each Monday on K-State's *Agriculture Today* talk show. These programs will explain the many aspects of the new plan. *Agriculture Today* is part of the K-State Radio Network. The broadcast interviews are podcast online at [www.ksre.ksu.edu/news/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=66](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/news/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=66).

The following is a slightly edited transcript of the third in the 2012 series of *Agriculture Today* radio broadcasts on the Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan. This is an interview with Kay Johnson, manager of the office of environmental initiatives for the city of Wichita, conducted by Eric Atkinson of the K-State Radio Network.

Q: Could you briefly outline for us how air quality is regulated in Wichita?

A: In Kansas, the local jurisdictions do not regulate air quality. The state of Kansas oversees our air quality on the state level, and the Environmental Protection Agency on the federal level. But in the larger metropolitan areas, such as Kansas City and Wichita, we are contracted to maintain the air quality monitors for KDHE. We have a website for the city of Wichita, and KDHE's day-to-day ozone levels are listed on our web site. We monitor year-round priority pollutants under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Q: That would include temporary exceedances in smoke content, right?

A: Yes. It's not just smoke from burning in the Flint Hills. We can have smoke from wildfires in Oklahoma and Texas influencing air quality in Wichita. We can also have ozone precursor chemicals coming up from Oklahoma and Texas that can also cause us to have exceedances. So potential problems can be transported to our area from a variety of regions.

Q: You were involved in the drafting of the Smoke Management Plan. As you look back on its first year of implementation, what's your general impression of how well it worked?

A: Those who were involved in the drafting of this plan believe it was a good first effort. We know that we made an impact with our educational efforts because people did start burning in March. It is a hopeful sign if burning can be spaced out over time rather than occurring all in the same day. Some people may have a more difficult time modifying their burning patterns than others. We understand that because we conduct prescribed burns in some of the parks within the city during that same time period. So we understand there is a very small window to get your burn in.

Q: That's probably something that many people are not aware of, that there is prescribed burning within the city of Wichita routinely every year.

A: Right. We have our parks on which we want to maintain the native grasses, too, and some of them are burned every year for some of the very same reasons that the Flint Hills are burned. We're

trying to be very careful to spread out the timing of our burns as much as we can, but we know – just like those in the Flint Hills -- that there's a very small window. Sometimes we don't get to burn all our parks.

Q: It's also important to note that the city of Wichita does take action to limit its own air quality emissions, right?

A: Right. For decades, the city of Wichita has been involved in ozone monitoring. Even back in the '70s, we've had high levels of ozone at times in this area. We know that we generate our own emissions, and we've worked with our large industries to limit this. They have voluntarily reduced and restricted many of the chemicals they use and other things they do. Consequently, large businesses and industries are not the ones that are most responsible for the emissions in our area now. It is the smaller businesses and actions by individuals, as well as vehicles and lawn mowers, that have the largest impact on air quality in Wichita.

Q: So your message is that the smoke management plan is off to a good start, and you're hoping it will pick up more momentum this year?

A: Right. But again, in addition to attempting to reduce smoke concentrations from Flint Hills burning on any given day, it's also important to understand that we have a number of activities to reduce our own emissions within the Wichita area. Just as one example, we are going to start promoting a reduced idling policy initiative that involves fleet vehicles, and we're working with businesses and industry on that. We also have many other ongoing programs related to reducing emissions.

Q: It's an all-inclusive effort, right?

A: It is. It's not just one source that can cause ozone exceedances. It's many different sources and it's going to take a lot of effort to reduce overall emissions.

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