

Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan: The April non-agricultural burning restrictions

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.

The following is a slightly edited transcript of the seventh in the 2012 series of *Agriculture Today* radio broadcasts on the Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan. This is an interview with Miles Stotts, Kansas Department of Health and Environment environmental scientist, conducted by Eric Atkinson of the K-State Radio Network.

Q: The April regulations on burning put into place last year as part of the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan are very important to those outside of agriculture. Can you fill us in on that?

A: The primary focus of burning in the spring in Kansas tends to be agricultural burning. But we also have a lot of burning done by municipalities and people who want to clean up debris. We took a look at the open burning regulations and how that is managed in light of air quality concerns in metropolitan areas. We came up with an approach that leaves open burning in April for the ranchers. We want the ranchers to be able to do what they need to do in April to keep their resources in good condition.

Q: What specifically do the restrictions say?

A: It is more or less a ban on non-agricultural burning in April. There are some exceptions. The gist of the regulation is that a person cannot open burn anything other than pasture during April in several counties, including Butler, Chase, Chautauqua, Cowley, Elk, Geary, Greenwood, Johnson, Lyon, Marion, Morris, Pottawatomie, Riley, Sedgwick, Wabaunsee, and Wyandotte. We include the three most populous counties in the state as a matter of balance. Because of the concentration of people in those areas and because that's where we have the greatest air quality concerns, we felt like it was important to ask those folks to avoid burning excessively during April as well as asking those in the Flint Hills to limit their burning to essential agricultural burning. We do have some exceptions. For example, folks who want to do some fishing or camping early in the spring are allowed to have a camp fire. In our regulations we call that burning for "ceremonial" purposes. We also make some provisions for emergency burning. We ask that folks go through the KDHE district offices or through their local fire department. Many communities have some additional restrictions in addition to KDHE's requirements under the open burning regulations. This is a state regulation and a work in progress. We're always trying to make it work better. This will be the second year that this particular restriction has been in place during April. Things seemed to go pretty well last year. I think folks are now planning ahead and understanding that if they have trees and brush that need to be disposed of with open burning, then they need to do that in either March or May.

Q: Many rural residents take care of their household waste by using burn barrels. Is that regulated by the April open burning restrictions?

A: Burning trash is regulated year-round, but it is allowed. In that particular case, the local ordinance takes precedence. So if your local town, township, or county has a regulation that prohibits open burning of trash, then that takes precedence over state regulations. But state regulations do allow open burning of trash from a household of up to a quadraplex. So a person can burn their own household trash or storm debris even during April, if necessary, under other regulations.

Q: Where can people find out more about these regulations?

A: KDHE's Bureau of Air maintains a web site at kdheks.gov. On that web site, look for "Environment" and "Air" tab. Under that tab there is another tab for open burning. That will lead you to the regulations. There is also a great web site as part of the new smoke management plan -- ksfire.org.

-- Steve Watson, Agronomy e-Update Editor
swatson@ksu.edu