

## NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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**For Immediate Release**  
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### STATE FIRE COMMISSIONER URGES EXTREME CAUTION TO PREVENT FIRES

#### *Critical water shortages could make firefighting more difficult*

**HARRISBURG (July 26)** – On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, State Fire Commissioner David L. Smith today called on Pennsylvanians to be extremely cautious to prevent fires during the current drought emergency. The commissioner noted that low water supplies and declining water levels in streams, ponds and reservoirs could result in inadequate supplies for fire suppression.

"All of us need to be especially watchful and do everything we can to stop fires in our homes, businesses and wildlands," Smith said. "As dry as the fields and forests are, we could see what normally might be an easily contained fire spread to homes and businesses because of restricted water supplies."

On July 20, Gov. Ridge declared a drought emergency in 55 of the Commonwealth's 67 counties. Two days later, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission imposed a ban on all open fires in state forests and state gamelands. The ban applies to all of the Commonwealth's 2.1 million acres of state forests and 1.4 million acres of state gamelands.

Commissioner Smith expressed a particular concern for those who live in rural or suburban areas near fields and woodlands.

"Stopping fire before it starts is the best weapon we have to prevent tragedies and conserve water," Smith said.

The commissioner urged all Pennsylvanians to practice sound fire-safety precautions at all times. Outdoor burning and the careless disposal of smoking materials were cited as areas of particular concern to fire officials. Cooking accidents also were noted as the leading cause of fire in the Commonwealth.

Commissioner Smith pointed to the number of fires along roads and in homes caused by lit cigarettes and other smoking debris being improperly discarded or unattended.

He also asked residents to take special care in cooking. Unattended cooking appliances, the placement of combustibles like kitchen towels and paper goods near cooking surfaces, and unsafe practices such as wearing loose-fitting clothing near cooking surfaces were cited as some of the factors that make Pennsylvania's kitchens among the most fire-prone areas in any home.

For more information on the [drought](#) or fire safety, go to the state's webpage at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), or directly to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency website at [www.pema.state.pa.us](http://www.pema.state.pa.us) or the Department of Environmental Protection website at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us).

For more information, contact Marko Bourne of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency 717-651-2139.

SOURCE Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency Website: <http://www.pema.state.pa.us>

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