

A Burning Desire
Sept 26, 2011

Adam Speir – Madison County Cooperative Extension Agent – Agriculture and Natural Resources

Coming from the School of Forestry and Natural Resources at UGA, it might be an understatement to say that many of my peers were pyromaniacs. The most exciting time of year for us was when a small group of students were able to participate in the prescribed burning class held in Baker County where we learned the fine art of prescribed burning and how best to manage the destructive nature of fire for good. We learned that fire is an important management tool in forest ecosystems and also has benefits for wildlife populations. The use of fire also serves other management purposes aside from use in forest prescribed burning. However, Madison County is one of many counties affected by a yearly summer burn ban that limits or prohibits many of the uses of open burning. Fortunately for my fellow pyro-friends in the county, this burn ban will be lifted starting October 1st and will last until May 1st.

Although the burn ban will be lifted in just a few days, I want to explain what you can do, what you can't do, and what some of the restrictions are for open burning. First, let's start with what you can't do. You are not allowed, at ANY time of the year, to openly burn garbage or dimensional lumber anywhere in Georgia, even if in a burn barrel. It is also illegal to burn tires, shingles, or plastic. This is a violation of state law and is enforced by the state Environmental Protection Division (EPD). There are no exemptions for this rule, even in agricultural instances. This is mainly a public safety concern; especially the public safety of the one who would be doing the burning. Many items such as plastics or old pressure treated lumber can release dangerous compounds when burned. The safest alternative is to landfill any garbage or lumber.

Now let's talk about the good news. Now that the burn ban is lifted, several practices are allowed including:

- Burning of leaves on the property on which they fall by the person in control of the property.
- Disposal of vegetative debris from storm damage: For burning of natural vegetation, you should obtain a burn permit from the Georgia Forestry Commission. For hand-pilled vegetation, you can obtain a burn permit online by going to www.gfc.state.ga.us. For machine-pilled vegetation, you will need to call the local office in Elberton at 706-213-2027.
- Weed abatement, disease, and pest prevention: If you plan on doing any burning of this type, you will also need to obtain a burn permit from the Forestry Commission.
- Acquired structure burning: This is for the burning of a house, building, or structure for the exclusive purpose of providing training to firefighting personnel. Prior to burning, the building should be inspected to make sure asbestos is not present. If asbestos is present, it must be removed and forms must be submitted to the EPD. Authorization for acquired structure burning must be obtained from the EPD. For more information on this type of burning, contact the EPD office at 706-369-6376. For anyone wanting to dispose of a structure through burning, you should go through your local fire department to

make it a training opportunity.

- Citizens are allowed to burn one pile, 60 by 60 feet (or equivalent) within a 9-acre area at one time.
- Open burning for land clearing using an air-curtain destructor provided that several conditions are met.

Several practices are allowed throughout the year, including prescribed burning, fire for recreational purposes or cooking food, and use of fire for carrying out recognized agricultural practices.

If you're not sure about something in regards to open burning, it's always best to ask first so as to prevent violation of any state laws and to ensure that open burning is continued to be an option for landowners in the state. Contact the local extension office at 706-795-2281 or the other state agencies mentioned in the article. You can also visit our website at www.caes.uga.edu/madison.