

David Hallauer, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Crop and Soils, Horticulture

Prescribed Burn Planning

Six weeks ago in this space, I wrote about planning for a prescribed burn. The predominant focus was if a prescribed burn was really for you. If you want to check that column out, you can do so by scrolling down to the Weekly News Articles section at:

<http://www.meadowlark.k-state.edu/crops-soils/index.html> . It will be the fourth or fifth option.

Since burning season began in earnest over the last couple of weeks in northeast Kansas, I want to hit this week on an equally important aspect of the prescribed burn: safety.

Start by knowing local regulations. To list them all in this space would be impossible! Many require a burn permit and/or permission to initiate a prescribed burn. Before you ever even think about starting the burn, make sure you understand local regulations and get appropriate local permission before you begin.

Once you know local regulations, be sure you understand how fire is going to respond. For example, one of the reasons there are burning regulations about ignition of fires at a certain time before sunrise and before sunset, is because of the way fire behaves. It's difficult enough to judge distance during a daytime fire, let alone trying to maneuver around landmarks or other hazards after dark. Dew tends to increase smoke production, reducing visibility as well. Understanding fire behavior around culverts, up and over hillsides, even around power lines is important from a safety standpoint as well. In the absence of local regulations, state statutes need to be considered.

Personal safety considerations are important, too. Those with heart conditions, certain allergies, or respiratory diseases should think twice about participating in the controlled burn. Clothing should include a cap or hat, gloves, and high top boots or shoes. Clothing should be of natural fibers and cover the arms, legs, hair, and body.

Equipment should be in good working order with all on the burn crew aware of how to operate equipment and equipped with appropriate firefighting tools. Water needs to be in plentiful supply – including drinking water to keep the crew hydrated. Waiting until the morning of the fire to make sure the pump on the sprayer works is not in the best interest of anyone's safety! Have a burn boss – a point person coordinating the burn – is strongly suggested!

Be courteous! Logic says that where there's fire, there's smoke. Notify neighbors and let them know what you are doing in advance of the burn. Be aware of structures or other flammable areas so you can direct the burn accordingly. Smoke often carries not only flying sparks and embers, but other particulate matter as well. This particulate matter can be a hazard for those with health concerns and affect air quality monitoring not just miles, but *states* away! In addition to appropriate notification of fire departments in advance of the fire, it's also nice (and sometimes required!) that notification be given when the fire is out as well. If roadways border the burn area, extra precautions need to be taken to keep them free of smoke or safe for travel when smoke might be present.

Prescribed burns are a great way to clean up unwanted brush and nuisance trees – but only if you are prepared to conduct the burn and are able to carry it out in such a manner that you achieve your desired outcome. Start planning now to determine if a prescribed burn is the best option. If it is, continue preparations to give you an effective – and SAFE! – prescribed burn