

Fireworks banned within city limits

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"I would much rather have some citizens and some fund raising groups mad at me and take the heat from that than look at someone who has lost their house or worse," she said.

Fairbanks added that the city has an obligation to ban both sale and discharge, because if sales were still allowed, people would likely set off the fireworks they bought.

Commissioner Bill Finley agreed, and suggested banning fireworks immediately, but revisiting the decision on Monday to see if anything can or needs to be changed. Mayor John Garcia said that according to the forecast, the city is not likely to get enough rain by July 2 to matter.

Fairbanks expressed concern about the professional fireworks display, saying it is impossible to know where the embers will go. James said he felt comfortable going ahead with the display. The city and rural fire departments will have trucks on standby — trucks designed to fight both field and structure fires. The fireworks themselves are designed to explode at a certain height and

have embers that will go out long before they land, he said.

"We can handle it," James said. "This is the fifth year we've helped out. We'll have a pretty heavy fire department presence out there."

Gerber said he had spoke to Joe Diaz, who's company puts on the display each year. Diaz told him that he would not shoot off the fireworks if the conditions are not safe.

Gerber said if the commission does feel the need to cancel the show, there is a cancellation fee of 30 percent of the contract. However, Diaz and the fair board can set an alternative date. Gerber said Diaz had suggested some time during the Sherman County Fair as a possible alternate date.

Finley made the motion to ban sales and discharge of personal fireworks in the city. Fairbanks seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Police Chief Cliff Couch said there will be anywhere from a \$5 to \$100 fine for anyone violating the ban. While the city police have issued warnings in the past, Gerber said he and Couch had agreed on a no tolerance policy this year.

Sherman Sheriff reminds citizens to look after elderly in heat wave

Sheriff Kevin Butts issued a release Wednesday reminding citizens that the elderly can be particularly vulnerable to heat waves.

He asked neighbors, caregivers and the general public to make sure seniors, especially those with health concerns or those who live alone, have their needs met in the extreme heat. Butts encouraged those without air conditioning to seek shelter from high temperatures at area senior centers, libraries or other public places.

"This heat warning should not be taken lightly," he said. "By being proactive, we hope to prevent serious illnesses and even death in this heat wave."

Wednesday was the fifth consecutive day that temperatures topped 106 degrees in Goodland. Highs on Tuesday and Wednesday were 110 degrees. Hill City has the highest local temperature so far with 115 on Tuesday and Wednesday. Sherman County is also almost 4 inches under

the normal amount of precipitation it receives by this time of year.

The temperatures were expected to be a little lower Thursday with a predicted high of 103. Friday's high is expected to be 105, with things getting a little cooler Saturday and Sunday. The National Weather Service is also predicting scattered thunderstorms throughout the rest of the week.

Officials have tips for wildfire prevention

Cheyenne, Rawlins and Sherman counties have all banned open burning within the county. This includes but not limited to controlled burning of grass or fields, fire pits, charcoal grills, trash, yard debris and in many locations also restrict the use of fireworks. The combination of above normal temperatures, below normal precipitation, low relative humidity and wind has caused high fire risk for much of the area.

Emergency Management Officials continue to work closely with partners such as the National Weather Service, county and state official, emergency responders, law enforcement officers and local fire chiefs to monitor the situation, said Emergency Management Coordinator Ryan Murray. Al Pietrycha, meteorologist from the Goodland National Weather Service office said today "for the next couple weeks it appears right now we will have continued well above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation. Also with any thunderstorms that should develop

and given how dry it is, there will be an increased threat of spot fires caused by lightning."

Below are some helpful tips to help prepare for and mitigate risk should your home or property be involved in wildfire disaster.

- Removed vegetation including grass and weeds away from foundations of structures.
- Use rock, concrete or fresh dirt as fire barrier around base of home or structures.
- Keep trees, bushes and shrubs trimmed and away from structures.
- Have sprinklers and water hoses readily available to wet area around your property.
- Keep grass and weeds mowed and be cautious while driving or parking vehicles or equipment in tall vegetation.
- Rural residents should plow a fire barrier around property or equipment that neighbors grass, wheat stubble or vegetative fields and keep a tractor and disc nearby if available.
- Livestock fencing should be kept in good

repair is using electric fence chargers.

• As with any emergency always make a plan with your family in the event of evacuation and have a go kit available. For more information on what to include in an emergency kit and preparedness for family visit www.ksready.gov and click on how to be prepared.

Fire departments have already seen a dramatic increase in the number of fire emergencies over the last two weeks. Much appreciation to the many emergency service volunteers who take time away from jobs, family and put their lives at risk to protect life and property, Murray said. Also as we enter into the 4th of July season we would like to wish everyone a fun and safe celebration. Please remember to check with local authorities about restrictions on the use of fireworks in your area. Many of the counties in the tri-state area have burn bans and firework restrictions in place as well.

Four fires ravage Decatur County; six taken to county hospital

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ger and Martin May, said Decatur County Fire Chief Bill Cathcart. A total of damages has yet to be done, he said, so more people could have been affected.

The main fire was north of U.S. 36. A second fire was called in later that afternoon south of town, and a third fire reported that evening was a mile and a half north of the first. At 4:30 a.m. Wednesday another fire was reported at a farmstead southwest of town.

Sheriff Ken Badsky said it can take two to four years before burned fields can be planted again.

"Pray for rain," he said, grimacing over the blackened fields.

All fire stations from Decatur County — Oberlin, Norcatur and Jennings — responded, as well as those from Rawlins and Sheridan counties, Red Willow County, Neb., Culbertson, Neb. and Beaver Valley, Neb., Cathcart said.

Decatur County commissioners called an emergency meeting Wednesday morning to ban the sale and shooting off of fireworks. Oberlin Mayor Bill Riedel signed an order banning the sale and discharge of fireworks in town. Shooting off fireworks now is a class "A" misdemeanor.

Oberlin's Dollar General served as a collection spot Tuesday for water, food and sports drinks for volunteers in the field. Donations came in from all over the county and surrounding counties into the evening hours.

Merchants donated food and drink, as well as time to help hand out water and turn a spade in the field.

Almost 24 hours after the first call came in Decatur County, fire fighters were still in the field dealing with hot spots from the blaze.

HOW IT HAPPENED

At mid-afternoon Tuesday evening, no one seemed to know if the fire was contained or not.

"It's burned out in a few places" said farmer Roland May, "but it's not contained anywhere."

Farming equipment and families were being evacuated by then. It seemed like every time a fire was put down, the wind would pick up and start it back up again. These "hot spots" continued to cause problems throughout the night and into the next day.

There simply weren't enough firemen to go around. And no matter how many trucks pulled in with water tanks, there was never enough of that, either.

By 4:39 p.m. the eastern side of the fire had been contained, and by 4:45 p.m. the northern side was declared contained as well.

"It's like the dust bowl in the heavy spots," said a text message from the fire front. "If it's not soot and ash flying in your face, then it's dust."

"All I know is I've seen a lot of farmers and a lot of different fire departments," said Dan Grafel, treasurer and board member of D&S Grain of Traer.

By 5 p.m. the fire was reported

80 percent contained. At 5:37 p.m. Sheriff Badsky confirmed who had lost property so far.

The fire crew, with the exception of some from Nebraska, worked all through the night and through Wednesday, battling hot spots.

Wednesday morning, an observer reported that the fields north of US 36 "look like Mordor (a fictional volcanic land in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*). Everything smells burnt and it's black as far as the northern horizon. Its so quiet now that all you can hear is the wind, even emergency vehicles pass quietly over the ash."

Volunteers could be seen driving down county roads, spraying water at smoldering debris in the ditches to prevent more flareups.

"All I can say is, don't buy any fireworks," said volunteer firefighter Larry Ayers of Oberlin. "I don't think weather conditions will change that much by the Fourth."

At 10:45 a.m. Doeden confirmed the number of people who had been to the hospital due to the fire.

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