

Wildfires indeed can turn into killers

Burning debris was the major cause of Michigan's 10,000 wildfires last year.

That included fires that escaped while burning brush, burning grass and leaves raked into piles during spring cleanup; burning dead grass along the ditch and fence row; and burning papers in the old burn barrel sitting in the back yard.

Dry conditions and a wind gust can cause a little fire to rapidly spread. These fires grow in size and intensity and damage or destroy whatever is in their path.

- During 1985, the national toll from wildfires was:
- 44 civilians and firefighters died.
- 3 million acres were burned.
- 1,400 homes and structures were damaged or destroyed.
- \$400 million in suppression costs to federal, state and local fire agencies.
- \$500 million in estimated damages to property and natural resources.

ABOUT 75 percent of the wildfires in Michigan are caused by carelessness.

Underestimating the difficulty of controlling a fire once it has escaped is a common problem. How fast would a fire burn in standing dead, dry grass? With a 5 mph wind, 40 feet per minute; with a 10 mph, 145 feet per minute.

To compound the problem, the distance around the fire quadruples each time the fire doubles in length. Therefore, the more it spreads, the harder it becomes to extinguish. A person would be hard-pressed to extinguish a fire under these conditions once it had a few minutes of free burning.

The state Department of Natural Resources Forest Management Division responded to 493 wildfires that burned 9,711 acres during 1986. Debris burning accounted for 32 percent of that total. The main cause is burning during dry, windy conditions, using burn barrels without proper covers or leaving a fire unattended. Too often, a person lights a

fire, makes sure it is burning properly, then leaves the scene only to return a short time later to find the fire burning out of control.

THE DNR forest fire law requires that at any time the ground is not snow-covered, a person "shall not burn any flammable material on or adjacent to forest land, except for domestic purposes, with a permit from the director or his authorized representative." The authorized representative is usually field office personnel or your local fire department. The permit is free of charge.

Domestic purposes means any fire within the curtilage of a dwelling where the material being burned has been properly placed in a debris burner built of metal or masonry, with a metal covering device with openings no larger than three quarters of an inch, or a campfire or any fire within a building. That means a permit is needed for all outdoor fires except campfires or when burning debris in an approved debris burner. Some communities allow burning

only during specified hours, others forbid it entirely. No open burning is allowed in either Farmington or Farmington Hills. Tickets can bring a misdemeanor penalty of up to 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine.

ALTHOUGH NOT a major problem, grass fires do cost the cities money. Last year, Farmington Hills firefighters responded to 200-plus open burns, including a large grass fire at Heritage Park. Farmington

public safety officers responded to 25 open burns, including a large grass fire at Nine Mile and Gill. "We're obligated to go and put grass fires out," said Deputy Chief Peter Baldwin of the Farmington Hills Fire Department. "There's always the danger of grass fires spreading to sheds, garages, even homes, particularly in high winds," if not caught in time.

Spring is the worst time of the year in Michigan for grass and brush

fires. Dead vegetation from last year has dried out and burns readily. Add seasonal increases in wind speed and a small fire could quickly become a major wildfire that could consume homes and other buildings as well as grass and forest lands.

Any person who sets fire on any land and negligently allows the fire to escape and become a forest or grass fire is liable for all expenses incurred by the state in suppressing the fire.

Surplus food to be distributed

Surplus commodity food will be given out from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, April 21, in St. Alexander's Church, 27835 Shiloh, Farmington Hills.

The food, distributed through the Oakland Living Human Service Agency, includes cheese, butter, honey, rice and dry milk. It will be made available every other month. Eligible Oakland County residents should bring the following information

to register for the Surplus Commodity Food Program year: Social Security card, proof of income for the past 90 days and personal identification. The program runs from October 1986 to Sept. 1, 1987.

PEOPLE WHO have received commodities in the past should return their old USDA Surplus Commodity Food Registration Card at the time they register.

Seniors who regularly attend a senior center should contact that center for pickup dates and times. Homebound seniors should contact the senior center nearest their home to assure homebound delivery. Non-homebound seniors should call 624-5520.

Registration does not guarantee receipt of commodity food each time. Distribution is on a first-come, first-served basis.

carrier of the month

Farmington



Jaime Hocken

Jaime, 13, is the Farmington Observer's Carrier of the Month for April.

He delivers the Observer in Farmington Green West subdivision. He has delivered the Farmington Observer since October 1984.

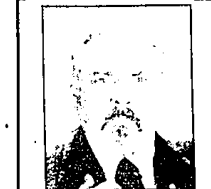
The O.E. Dunkel Middle School eighth grader's favorite subjects are history and science. He plans to go on to college after high school. His hobbies include football, basketball, baseball and bicycle riding.

Managing money and working with people are two skills Jaime feels he has acquired on his paper route.

Jaime is the son of Russell and Marianne Hocken. He has three brothers, Ryan 12, Garrett, 8 and Kevin, 5.

If you want to be a Farmington Observer carrier, please call 591-0500

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Clip the coupon below or if you prefer, call the Community Relations Department at 360-3300, extension 3450 for your packet.

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Name _____

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OE

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A Member of The Detroit Medical Center

The Hospital is located in Commerce Township between East Commerce and Sleeth Roads.