



# WILDFIRE

## *In Virginia* **A GUIDE FOR NEWS MEDIA**

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This guide is dedicated to the firefighters who risk their lives protecting Virginia’s citizens and natural resources and is presented as a public service for media in Virginia and other interested organizations by the **Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF)**. For more information, please visit our Web site at **[www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov)**

## Introduction

Wildfires and other catastrophes are major events and attract considerable attention of all Virginians. This is particularly true for the wildland-urban interface areas in Virginia. The public definitely has a right to information about such incidents; and many times they come to YOU for answers and help.

The purpose of this publication is twofold, first to help you better understand the organization, policies and terminology associated with suppression of major wildland fires, and secondly, to let you know where you and your staff can go to find information when your office gets the call for assistance. The Virginia Department of Forestry and all fire service organizations welcome inquiries from legislators. In fact, these agencies recognize that the legislative need-to-know is an integral part of keeping the public informed and spreading the wildland fire prevention message.

**Our biggest concern is that everyone approaches wildland fires safely in a manner that does not interfere with emergency efforts.**

Wildfire in Virginia can happen any month, anywhere. Traditionally "fire season" is in the spring (March and April) and then again in the fall (October and November). Why do you think this is so? During these times, the relative humidity is usually lower, winds tend to be higher, and the fuels are cured to the point where they readily ignite. Also, hardwood leaves are on the ground providing more fuel, and allowing sunlight to directly reach the forest floor, warming and drying the surface fuels. The potential for the most devastating losses is at its highest during this time; the spring being the most dangerous and with the greatest potential for loss of resources. For this reason, Virginia enacted the 4 PM Law in 1950. A brief section on the major fire laws in Virginia can be found later in this publication.

The principles discussed in this guide also apply to other emergency or incident management situations that involve federal and state land management agencies operating under what is called the **National Interagency Incident Command System (ICS)**. More on this valuable tool coming up soon. Read on!

## Can "IT" Happen Here?

Records indicate that most of Virginia's wildfires are caused by people. Virginia is growing more rapidly than many other states, and its population has doubled in the last 45 years. People are moving into residential developments in forested areas, and there is an increased use of the forests for recreational purposes. All this increases the risk of wildfires and requires continued fire prevention and protection activities.

As fire activity fluctuates during the year from month to month, it also varies from year to year. Some years, Virginia gets adequate rain and snow keeping fire occurrence low. Other years, the weather does not cooperate as well, and we have extended periods of warm, dry, windy, days, and, therefore, increased fire activity.

### Number of Wildfires and Acreage Burned from Fires the VDOF responded to.

YEAR	NUMBER OF FIRES	ACRES BURNED
2009	900	7,310
2010	897	8,485
2011	829	12,072
2012	630	6,901
2013	479	3,378
2014	710	10,022
2015	566	5,337
2016	550	15,835
2017 AS OF 5/31	421	6,292

You may only hear about the few "large" wildland fires that occur in your area, the ones which burn down structures, or the ones on which there is a fatality. However, it is these fires that are becoming all too frequent. This is a national concern, as well as a local one to the Commonwealth of Virginia. The loss of homes as a result of these fires has been of great concern nationally:



Myrtle Beach SC



Gatlinburg TN

### National Facts and figures

Year	Fires	Acres
2016	67,743	5,509,995

### Facts and figures

- According to NIFC, 2016 saw more than 67,000 wildfires burn over 5.5 million acres. The south led the nation with nearly 1.6 million acres burned.

- A total of 4,312 structures were destroyed by wildfires in 2016, including more than 3,000 homes and more than 70 commercial buildings. Tennessee accounted for the highest number of structures lost in one state in 2016 with more than 2,000 residences and 53 commercial structures destroyed; California was second with 754 residences and 12 commercial structures destroyed.
- There were 1,251 large or significant wildfires reported in 2016 (40,000 acres or more).
- The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) cites more than 72,000 U.S. communities are at risk from wildfires.
- **The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) cites more than 72,000 U.S. communities are at risk from wildfires. The VDOF estimates nearly 4,700 communities are at risk in the Commonwealth.**

**Can it happen in Virginia? It has and it will again, how devastating will the loss be???**



Northern Valley VA

Eastern VA

**HOMES/STRUCTURES (1998-2008)**

Year	Damaged/Destroyed		Protected	
	Homes	Other Structures	Homes	Other Structures
2006	14	48	531	351
2007	20	24	639	485
2008	16	50	601	432
2009	2	32	492	431
2010	2	15	378	289
2011	15	135	867	506
2012	10	50	409	473
2013	10	33	126	288
2014	23	80	584	597
2015	5	39	501	400
2016	80	37	343	711
2017*	10	28	2333	251

\*As of 5/31/2017

## VALUE (2006-2016\*)

	Damaged/Destroyed		Protected	
	Homes	Other Structures	Homes	Other Structures
	\$4,011,153	\$5,259,600	\$579,604,467	\$119,491,034
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,270,753</b>		<b>\$699,065,501</b>	

## DAMAGES (2008)

\$1.5 million structure

\$13.25 million timber

\$873,500.00 suppression costs

Too often, we focus on the values “LOST” however; between 2006 and 2016\* the value of the homes alone “PROTECTED” is a staggering **\$579,604,467**.



Buckingham County

These homes would have burned if it had not been for the efforts of the Virginia Department of Forestry and the local fire departments.

It is only a matter of time before someone's home will burn or their community will be impacted by fire, **it is then that your phone will ring.**

## *Virginia's Forest Fire Laws*

In Virginia, most forest fires are the result of human actions, and can be prevented by using common sense; following fire safety rules, and obeying fire laws.

Virginia's forest fire laws are designed – and have been successful over the years – in protecting the forest resources of the Commonwealth. The Department of Forestry's Special Forest Wardens, commissioned by the Governor, enforce these fire laws. These laws address fire issues, such as liability for escaped fires; responsibility for unattended fires near flammable material; failure to take proper care and precaution when burning, and various statutes pertinent to maliciously and intentionally set fires. The 4PM Burning Law has historically served as a successful fire prevention tool in protecting Virginia's forest resources as evidenced by the state's low fire occurrence as compared to other southern states.

There are several laws that deal with wildfires, the most common are identified below.

Cost Recovery for Fire Protection § 10.1-1141 Liability and recovery of cost of fighting forest fires

4 p.m. Burning Law § 10.1-1142 Regulating the burning of woods, brush, etc.; penalties | Exemption from the 4 p.m. Burning Law.

Throwing flammable objects from vehicle on highway while in or near certain lands § 10.1-1143

Rewards for information leading to conviction of arsonists or incendiaries § 10.1-1138

Serious Fire Hazards § 10.1-1158

<http://dof.virginia.gov/laws/fire-laws.htm>

The above web site will give you complete information on all forest fire laws in Virginia.

## *Interagency Cooperation*

**There is no way one agency can fight all the wildland fires that occur in Virginia.** The Virginia Department of



Forestry takes the lead for wildfire suppression on state and private lands working very closely with volunteer and paid fire departments all across Virginia. For the past several years, the land management and firefighting agencies on many federal, state and private levels, have worked together under a coordinated Incident Command System (ICS) to fight fires as they arise.

With all these agencies working towards a common goal of no lives being lost, no property being destroyed and suppressing the fires with the least amount of impact on the resource, Virginia can be proud to have one of the best "fire" records. That is, Virginia is recognized as having the least number of wildfires for the least amount of acreage

burned as compared with similar states. Part of Virginia's success is due to our fire laws and the wild fire prevention program here in the state.

Depending on the time and the place, you may find the suppression resources comprised of a single fire-plow bulldozer from the Department of Forestry and the local rural fire department with an old, but very functional fire engine with several firefighters, to state of the art suppression equipment. Some of this specialized equipment you may see on a significant wildfire is, helicopters with water buckets, air tankers, specially-outfitted fire engines called brush trucks, or VDOF Humvees designed and equipped to fight fires.



# The Incident Command System

The Incident Command System may seem like a confusing mix of bureaucracy, red tape and hurdles, but it's just the opposite. The Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazards incident management approach that:

Allows for the integration of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures and communications operating within a common organizational structure.

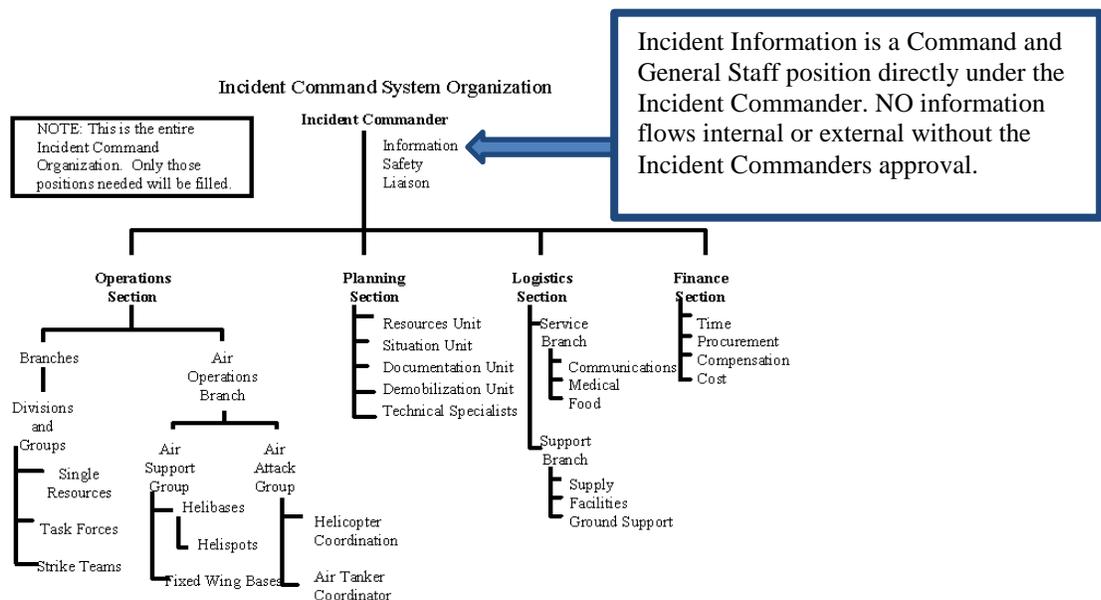
Enables a coordinated response among various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private.

Establishes common processes for planning and managing resources.

ICS is flexible and can be used for incidents of any type, scope and complexity. ICS allows its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure to match the complexities and demands of single or multiple incidents. In theory, its management structure builds as the incident builds. If a single person (the Incident Commander) can fulfill all roles on an incident then it's a one-person show; if not, the structure is there to build up.

Resource mobilization for larger fires on state and private lands in Virginia originates with the Virginia Department of Forestry additional assistance is provided by the **Virginia Interagency Coordination Center (VICC)** and the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM). The VICC is housed at the USDA Forest Service Office in Roanoke and the VDEM operates out of Richmond.

In addition to local resources, VICC can also draw upon firefighting resources from throughout the country through the Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC), who in turn can draw resources through the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC), the national interagency command center located in Boise, ID. When wildfires are burning in several parts of the country, or when local fires become increasingly complex, NIFC can dispatch specialized teams to help local firefighters plan and coordinate their resources.



## When You Get The Call.

When a fire occurs in Virginia, the first reaction is to jump in a vehicle and follow the smoke, fires are very exciting with a lot of activity going on. Sometimes, however, that's not always the best option. For one thing, a smoke column may not be a wildland fire. For another, if it is a wildland fire, you should thoroughly check things out beforehand to make sure you're not running headlong into a dangerous situation. The story is important, but your safety is our primary concern. After all, you can't tell your story from the back of an ambulance, or worse, from the morgue!

The following is a short check list that you might find helpful:

<b>1. Is it a wildland fire?</b>	Virginia derives much of its economy from agriculture. Farmers found out long ago that the quickest way to break down leftover organic matter after harvest is to burn it. As the season gets later, agriculture fires (commonly called " <i>ag burns</i> ") become more common. <i>These fires are generally well-contained and burn out within a short time.</i> Fire prevention officers work all year to help local farmers and private property owners to practice safe fire behavior when burning fields, ditches or debris.
<b>2. If it is a wildland fire! Has it been reported ?</b>	If the person you are talking to is the first person to see it, they should hang up and call 911, their local fire department or the nearest Virginia Department of Forestry office. Then they can call you back.
<b>3. Who's my main source for information on the fire?</b>	<p>If it's already been reported and the Virginia Department of Forestry has responded to it, the next person you want to talk to is the local Fire Information Officer (PIO). Often the dispatchers are busy coordinating resources, each Region has Information Officers to help handle information requests like yours.</p> <p>The PIO's job is to collect complete and accurate information about the incident's size, cause, status, people and equipment involved, and respond to matters of general interest. Although the PIO is usually on staff at the Dispatch Center, he or she may report to the Incident Command Center at the fire.</p> <p>A call to the Department of Forestry regional office covering your district will provide you with needed information or they will be able to give you the contact information for the Information Officer on the fire.</p> <p>Contact numbers can be found on the Department of Forestry's web site at <a href="http://www.dof.virginia.gov">www.dof.virginia.gov</a> .</p>
<b>4. Who else should I call?</b>	If the fire is particularly complex, sometimes a special incident management team from our Headquarters in Charlottesville will be utilized and an Information Officer will be part of that team. Contact numbers for our Headquarters are 434.977.6555 or 434.220.8040.

<p><b>5. What if a PIO is not available? What next?</b></p>	<p>In the unlikely event that a PIO is unavailable, some information might be available through the Incident Commander (also known as the IC). The Incident Commander manages all aspects of a fire, including tracking firefighters, the fire's growth or movement, and requesting additional resources. However, you can imagine that this is a busy person! If the IC is unavailable at the moment to talk about the fire, you can bet an Information Officer is not far away.</p>
<p><b>6. The role of the media.</b></p>	<p>Occasionally, the Information Officer may request that the news media help with sending out information the public needs to know. The media plays a very important role as an information resource to help local residents stay informed... AND SAFE.</p>

**Bottom line:**

The Fire Information Officers are there to help you get the information you need. Should you visit a fire scene, it will be the Information Officer who will assist you. Sometimes they may limit your access to the fire because of safety reasons, but for the most part, they are there to help you avoid the "run-around." They may escort you to the scene of the fire, and can also help arrange interviews with firefighters and the Incident Commander. The Department of Forestry's local Regional Office should always be your "first call" when a fire breaks and you need information. That Regional Office or our Headquarters will provide you with follow-up contact information.

***How to Get to the Fire Line!***

There is one overall rule for covering wildland fire stories: **SAFETY FIRST!**

As a common sense rule, nothing will be allowed to jeopardize the safety the news media or those involved with suppression activities. The Incident Information Officer will explain to you the rationale for any specific access restrictions. If you want to go out to the fire line, you'll be advised of the danger. You will not be allowed to go off by yourself, the Fire Information Officer or other responsible official will escort you to the line. Usually, there are always areas you can safely go and see the action.

Although no physical test is required, the Incident Commander may deny access to any individual who appears to be at risk if exposed to hazardous conditions on the fire line, or who may be a risk to others involved in managing the fire. Denial of access is usually the exception, and not the rule.

**General Policy**

- It is the policy of the Virginia Department of Forestry to provide news media access to incidents, such as wildland fires and prescribed fires.
- Federal and state agencies are required to provide equitable and maximum news media access to wildland fire incidents.
- For the purposes of these guidelines, news media representatives include print and broadcast reporters; freelance print reporters; freelance videographers, and photographers.
- While the wildland firefighting agencies seek to provide safe access to incidents for news media representatives, the ultimate responsibility for their safety lies with the individual reporter and his/her employer.

**Guidelines**

*Access*

- Visits to the fireline must receive the approval of the incident commander or designated representative.
- News media will be escorted by a person qualified as a single resource boss or other appropriate escort approved by the incident commander. The incident commander may delegate escort approval authority to other incident personnel, such as the lead Information Officer or appropriate local authority.

#### *Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)*

- News media representatives will be required to wear PPE as outlined in the Fireline Handbook and the Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations (the “Red Book”) when working **within** the fire perimeter, and have an appropriate safety briefing. PPE must meet National Fire Protection Association/National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards. The required PPE is:

- \_ 8-inch-high, lace-type work boots with non-slip, melt-resistant soles and heels
- \_ Nomex fire shirt
- \_ Nomex trousers
- \_ Hard hat with chinstrap
- \_ Leather gloves
- \_ Fire shelter

PPE **may be** provided by the fire organization if media representatives are unprepared.

***Many times you will be able to get your story without going within the fire perimeter and, in those situations, the required Personal Protective Equipment requirements will be minimal.***

#### *“Shadowing” Fire Crews*

- Incident personnel will facilitate in-depth coverage opportunities for journalists. News media representatives requesting to “shadow” crews for more than one operational period on the fireline or in the fire area must:

- o Wear personal protective equipment and understand how to use it.
- o Coordinate activities with the lead Information Officer, who will communicate with the affected crew boss, incident commander and the fire management officer at the crew’s home unit.

- It is strongly recommended that reporters requesting to shadow crews complete basic firefighter training, including S-130 and S-190. If these courses have been taken in a previous year, a current refresher course is recommended. News media representatives must be able to walk in difficult terrain and be in good physical condition, with no known limitations.

If you want to go out to the fireline, you’ll be advised of the danger. You will be discouraged from going off by yourself. In some locations, the Fire Information Officer or other responsible official will escort you to the line. Usually, there are always areas you can safely go and see the action.

Denial of access is usually the exception, though, and not the rule.

Here are some other things to consider before going out to the fire line:

1. **Location.** Access to wildland fires in Virginia can be easy or difficult, depending on the location and availability of access roads. In some remote locations, access by non-emergency personnel may be limited to foot travel or four-wheel drive. Some wilderness locations do not allow motorized access at all. The key to finding the fire is by getting in contact with the Information Officer before you start chasing smoke columns.

2. **Personal Protective Equipment.** All firefighters are required to wear personal protective equipment while out on the line. You are no different. Most of today's synthetic clothes are not fire retardant, and some may actually be harmful to you if a fire got too close to you. Likewise, some hairsprays and makeup may be **flammable** if you get in close proximity to a fire.

#### **Again, SAFETY FIRST!**

You will need to provide your own leather boots (no sneakers, or dress shoes allowed), and cotton undergarments (synthetics are more combustible or tend to melt to skin when exposed to high temperatures).

## How About a Plane Ride?



One question that is frequently asked is "Can we get a ride up in one of your planes or helicopters for some aerial shots?" The answer is **NO** – by Federal regulation only persons who are essential for the mission are allowed on these flights.

On rare occasions a media flight will be organized to allow reporters to view fires. Seating on these flights is limited and will be divided among representatives of various media groups. Your best way of getting aerial coverage is to contract a local charter service or flight operation. This method also has limitations, as airspace may be restricted in the area around and approaching the fire for safety reasons. Any aerial access to a fire must be cleared in advance. (Talk to your pilot about FAA flight restrictions under 91.137a.) Pre-approved flyovers can usually be arranged, but they must be coordinated with the Incident Commander first. This is something the Fire Information Officer can help you in arranging. He or she will coordinate your flight with the IC and Air Operations.



## Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS or drones)

### Drones are fun, but potentially deadly in the wrong place



Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), generally called drones, are gaining in popularity. Although drones are fun to fly, they can be deadly if flown near wildfires. Drones can interfere with wildland fire air traffic, such as air tankers, helicopters, and other firefighting aircraft that are necessary to suppress wildland fires. Aerial firefighting missions including aerial supervision, air tanker retardant drops, helicopter water drops, and smokejumper paracargo occur between ground level and 200 feet above ground level, which is the same altitude that many hobbyist drones fly.

Hobbyist drones and firefighting aircraft don't mix. All authorized aircraft on an incident maintain radio communication with each other to safely coordinate their missions, but aerial firefighting flight crews have no way to communicate with drone operators. Aerial firefighting

aircraft have no way to detect drones other than by seeing them, and visual detection is nearly impossible due to the small size of most drones. These factors make a mid-air collision with an unauthorized drone a distinct possibility.

## If You Fly, Someone Could Die

Even a tiny drone can cause a serious or fatal accident if it collides with firefighting aircraft. In most situations, if drones are spotted near a wildfire, firefighting aircraft must land due to safety concerns. This prolongs firefighting operations; in many cases, wildfires become larger when aircraft are not able to drop fire retardant, water, monitor wildfires from above, or provide tactical information to firefighters. Homes and other values at risk could burn needlessly, firefighters or others could be injured, or worst of all, a fatal accident could occur.



## Flying a Drone Near a Wildfire is Breaking the Law



Per the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, 43 CFR 9212.1(f), it is illegal to **resist or interfere with the efforts of firefighter(s) to extinguish a fire**. Doing so can result in a significant fine and/or a mandatory court appearance. So, be smart and just don't fly your drone anywhere near a wildfire. No amount of video or photos are worth the consequences.

**Please, don't fly your drone near a wildfire!**

## Other Parts to the Story

There are numerous angles to follow when on a wildland fire beyond the simple facts of the fire. Here are some of the more interesting ones:



**Detection.** While many fires are man-made, some are naturally caused. The Virginia Department of Forestry and its partners use a variety of methods to find fires. Some are simple, like a toll-free cell phone call. Others are very complex, like using infrared satellite imagery to find hot spots, mapping locations and fire perimeters using the Global Positioning System, or detecting potential fires with a sophisticated lightning detection system.

**Logistics.** Getting people and resources to a fire is no easy task. Fires can break any time, day or night, and VDOF uses a small army of people to get equipment and firefighters to the scene. Their work continues even after the fires are "out" to get people and equipment home and the bills paid.

**Planning.** The Planning Section of the fire collects and evaluates the latest information on the fire, evaluates suppression strategies and shift plans, and distributes information on the fire to other sections of the Incident Command System. Sometimes this function is located in the VDOF Dispatch Center, but sometimes it's located right at the fire's Incident Command Post (ICP).



**The Camp.** Fire camps are often small communities within themselves. The men and women who are our firefighters can range in age from 18 to 60+ years old, come from all different nationalities and backgrounds, and generally work 12-hour shifts. Fire camps may contain as many as 500 firefighters, depending on the size and complexity of the fires.

Services within the camp also vary in size depending on the number of people involved. If a base camp has been established, a media representative can usually find an Information Officer to help. The Information Officer will orient you or media reporters to what facilities and services are available, such as:

- ◆ Access to team members for interviews
- ◆ Maps, shift plans, special interest items and general information
- ◆ Contacts or coordination with local law enforcement, security personnel or government officials
- ◆ Access to telephones or other media services
- ◆ First aid or medical needs
- ◆ Sanitation facilities and wash area



**Fire Prevention.** The Virginia Department of Forestry has a very active fire prevention program, especially in more rural areas. Many serious wildland fires are caused by the careless acts of people. The news media is especially valuable in making the public aware of potentially dangerous fire situations, the conditions that contribute to wildland fires, and what can be done to prevent fires. It is the fires that DON'T start in the first place that are the easiest of fight. The Department of Forestry has been combating the problem of forest fires since 1914. While maintaining some traditional ways, they have also developed new techniques to detect and suppress wildland fires.



**Rehabilitation.** Now that the fire's out, what next? There may be many reasons we would choose to rehabilitate a burned area: to reduce wind erosion, to prevent the invasion of cheatgrass or noxious weeds, or to prevent damage to water quality, among others. Rehabilitation can include reseeding an area with native or non-native vegetation, smoothing or removing berms in fire line roads, protecting stream channels and soils, or other activities. A team of specialists from the local forestry department is usually assigned after a fire to determine what rehabilitation, if any, needs to be done. Sometimes the plan is developed and implemented while the fire is still burning.

**Tactics.** Aircraft are one of the tools used to fight the fire, and often many different types of aircraft are used. Many are helicopters that transport small amounts of people or equipment to remote areas. Some are large tankers filled with retardant, a chemical mixture added to water and designed to slow a fire's progress. The retardant is usually a fertilizer-based mixture that's used to slow the rate of spread and cool the flames. Once the fire is out, the fertilizer in the retardant will help spur plant growth. These are just a few of the many tactics fire fighters may use.



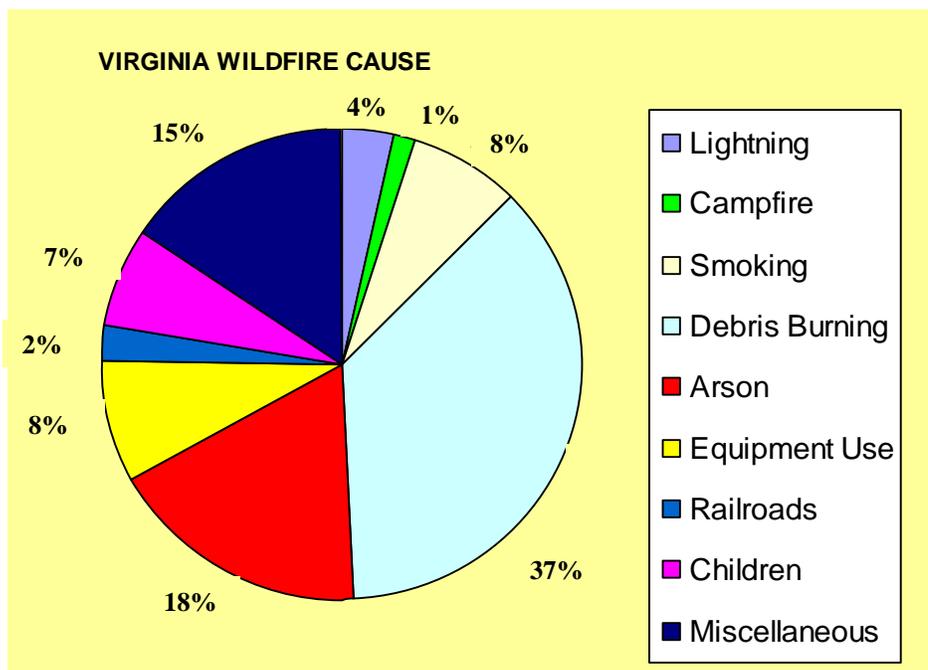
# Causes of Wildland Fires

Records indicate that people cause most of Virginia's wildfires. Virginia is growing more rapidly than many other states, and its population has doubled in the last 45 years. People are moving into residential developments in forested areas, and there is an increased use of the forests for recreational uses. All this increases the risk of wildfires and requires continued fire prevention and protection activities.

Forest fires, also called wildfires or outdoor fires, occur in Virginia on average about 1,200 times per year. These fires burn an average of 12,000 acres. People may be injured or killed, buildings are destroyed, and significant damage to the forest and environment occurs.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOP) is responsible for the control of forest fires in counties and some cities. Fire departments, forest industry and many volunteers work together with the VDOP wardens to save lives, property and forest resources. Forest wardens investigate all forest fires to find the person responsible; collect suppression costs, or issue a summons to court for forest fire law violations.

In any given year, the number of fires and the cause of those fires changes as they are directly influenced by environmental conditions. The following table indicates the historic average of number of fires by cause for an "average" year



Smoking	95
Camping	15
Equipment Use	100
Debris Burning	500
Railroad	25
Children	110
Arson	165
Lightning	35

Accurate origin & cause determination is an essential first step in a successful fire investigation, and successful fire investigations are necessary in preventing unwanted wildfires. Proper investigative procedures, which occur with initial attack, can more accurately pinpoint fire causes and can preserve valuable evidence that might otherwise be destroyed by suppression activities. If the fire is human-caused, the protective measures can preserve evidence that may lead to effective and fair administrative, civil or criminal actions.

The investigation must start at the time a fire is reported or discovered. First responders play an important role in protecting evidence, so it is important for the origin and cause investigator to help train all first responders to identify and protect the area of origin of the fire.

The Virginia Department of Forestry is required to investigate each wildfire to determine the cause and responsible party. If necessary, this will facilitate the recovery of the cost of suppressing the wildfire.

## Social Media Resources

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ForestryVA/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ForestryVA>

During a wildfire incident we share updates on our Facebook and Twitter pages as information becomes available. These updates may be in the form of a press release, maps and photos, or brief headlines. We encourage media to share that information, including photos, maps and other images. You are our partners in getting accurate and relevant information to the public in a timely manner. We appreciate being tagged in any social media posts related to a VDOF event or operation.

Please note that while we actively monitor our social media channels during a wildfire incident we may not always be able to respond to questions immediately. We encourage you to contact the Public Information Officer/Media Contact directly if you have questions. Each news release posted on Facebook during an incident will list the current media contact with a cell phone number.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q: How are wildfires put out?

**A:** You need three things to keep a fire going: fuel, oxygen and heat. The total fire suppression effort removes one or more of these necessary ingredients. For example, fire lines remove vegetation - a fire's access to fuel. The fire is sometimes smothered in dirt to remove its oxygen supply. Water and retardant may be used to cool flames and remove heat.

### Q: What's the difference between "Containment" of a fire and "Controlling" a fire?

**A:** A fire is not considered "controlled" until it is all the way out. Until then, firefighters work toward "containing" the fire. Here's one way to think of it: Think of a container – say, a mason jar. A fire is contained when it's all "bottled in," like in a container. The fire may still be burning, but if a distinct fire line is built around the entire perimeter so that there is no chance for the fire to escape or spot over outside the line, then the firefighters declare the fire "contained."

After containing the fire, the next step is to get it under control – that is, make sure it is **dead out** – no hot spots, no floating embers, nothing that will flare up again if a breeze should come along.

### Q: What is the difference between a "prescribed fire" and a "wildfire?"

**A:** A *wildfire* is an unplanned or unwanted fire. Such a fire may be a threat to resources, structures or people. Despite the cause, these fires are suppressed using strategies and tactics appropriate to the threat.

A *prescribed fire* is one that is started intentionally by qualified, trained personnel. There are many reasons why the government would choose to start a fire intentionally, such as reducing the number of large, old trees to give ground vegetation a chance to grow and improve habitat for wildlife. Another reason may be to reduce the amount of fuel that would otherwise burn in a large, catastrophic wildfire. Like a doctor's prescription, there are specific conditions that must be met before the agency lights a prescribed fire, including favorable temperatures, low winds and optimum humidity. Other precautions also include a well-defined containment area to minimize the possibility of the fire escaping. Even if most of these conditions are in place, the supervisors in charge of igniting the fire may stop the ignition for a variety of reasons. If they determine that weather conditions are too unstable, that the lines are not sufficiently defined, if enough firefighting equipment and people are not available, if there is a threat to

public or firefighter safety, or for many other reasons. If these conditions are not in place, just as if the doctor's prescription is not followed carefully, the "remedy" may prove just as harmful as the problem.

**Q: What is "mop-up?"**

**A:** Once the fire stops its spread, firefighters begin the task of mop-up. This involves extinguishing, cooling or removing burning material along or near the control line to reduce further spread of the fire.

## *Fire Season*

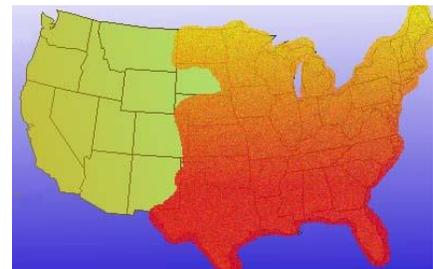
Fire "season" in Virginia peaks traditionally in the spring and again during the fall of each year. The spring season normally starts the latter part of February and continues through the end of April. Our fall season runs from the middle of October until early December. Fires can and do occur throughout the year, not just during these peak fire seasons. Should the weather turn very hot and dry in the summer, we may have numerous fires during a time which fire activity normally is at a low.



FEBRUARY



MARCH



APRIL



MAY

The orange/red coloring on the maps indicate the areas of the country that are in "fire season" for the specific months identified.



OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER

## Key Definitions

- ◆ **Air Tanker** – A large fixed wing aircraft capable of delivering nearly 2,000 gallons of water or retardant on a fire in a bombing fashion.
- ◆ **Backfire (or Backburn)** - A fire set along the inner edge of a control line to consume the fuel in the path of a wildland fire, and/or to change the direction of force on the fire's "convection column."
- ◆ **Blow-Up** – A sudden increase in fire activity or rate of spread sufficient to preclude direct control or upset existing control plans. Often accompanied by a violent convection and may have other characteristics of a firestorm.
- ◆ **Burning Out** – Setting backfires on a small scale and with closer control, in order to consume patches of unburned fuel and aid in construction of control lines.
- ◆ **Closed Area** – An area in which specific activities - or even entry - is temporarily restricted to reduce the risk of fires caused by people.
- ◆ **Closure** – Legal restriction of specific activities such as smoking, camping, or entry into an area.
- ◆ **Confine a fire** – To restrict a fire within determined boundaries established either prior to, or during, a fire.
- ◆ **Contain a fire** – To take suppression action, as needed, which can reasonably be expected to check the fire's spread under prevailing conditions. In short, to "bottle a fire in."
- ◆ **Control a fire** – To complete a control line around a fire, any spot fires, and any interior islands to be saved. Also, to burn out any unburned areas adjacent to the fire sides of the control lines, and to cool down all "hotspots" that are immediate threats to the control line so that the control line can be expected to hold under any foreseeable conditions.
- ◆ **Crew** – A group of firefighters, usually with 20 members (including a crew boss)
- ◆ **Crown Fire** – A fire which burns in tree tops (going from tree top to tree top), and which burns all or a large part of the upper branches and foliage of the trees.
- ◆ **Drought Index**- Also referred to as KBDI or CSI, a measure of how dry the ground moisture is. The scale goes from 0 to 800 with 0 being complete ground saturation and 800 being desert like conditions.
- ◆ **Engine** – Any ground vehicle providing specified levels of water pumping capabilities.
- ◆ **Escaped fire** – A fire that has exceeded initial attack capabilities, and is spreading.
- ◆ **Fireline** – A break in the fuel, used to stop the spread of the fire.
- ◆ **Fire Shelter** – A personal protection item carried by fire fighters which, when deployed, unfolds to form a tent-like shelter of heat reflective materials.
- ◆ **Fuel Type** – Refers to the type of vegetation in which a fire is burning. Used in predicting fire behavior and determining effects of a fire.
- ◆ **Initial Attack** – The control efforts undertaken by firefighters who are first to arrive at the incident.
- ◆ **Lead Plane** – A plane used to guide other aircraft usually air tankers to the "drop" location.
- ◆ **Prescribed Burn** - Controlled application of fire to wildland fuels, under specified environmental and weather conditions, to produce a fire that is confined to a pre-determined area.
- ◆ **Resources** – All personnel and major items of equipment available, or potentially available, for assignment to a fire incident.
- ◆ **Slop Over** – A fire which has breached the fireline.
- ◆ **Spot Fire** – Unwanted fire that occurs outside the perimeter of the main fire, caused by flying sparks or embers. Usually some distance beyond the fireline.
- ◆ **Strike Team** – Specified combinations of the same kind and type of resources, with common communications and a leader.
- ◆ **S.E.A.T.S** – Single Engine Air Tanker (s) A smaller version of the Air Tanker, this carries up to 200 gallons of water.
- ◆ **Torching** – A tree that suddenly erupts into flames from the base to the top.
- ◆ **Wildfire** – Any fire occurring on wildland, except a fire that is under prescription.
- ◆ **Wildland** – An area in which development is essentially non-existent, except for roads, railroads, power lines, and similar transportation or utility structures.

## Miscellaneous Information

National Fire Season Themes for 2015 The national themes are designed to be broad in scope so communicators can tailor each message to meet the needs of the local situation. 1. Our top priority is to keep the public and firefighters safe. • No structure, natural resource, or cultural resource, is worth the loss of human life. • Reducing risk to firefighters and the public is the first priority in every activity. 2. Teamwork, partnerships and cooperation are essential in managing wildfires. • Wildfire knows no boundaries. Local, state, tribal and federal agencies support one another in wildfire response, planning and decision making. • Working together keeps our responsiveness up and costs down. Together, we can share limited resources, whether they are firefighters, equipment or other services. 3. Wildfires are managed in different ways. • The same fire may have several objectives, which can be modified as the fire moves across the landscape. • Fires that threaten life, property and important natural and cultural resources will be put out as safely and quickly as possible. • Many landscapes are out of ecological balance. When the conditions are right, fire is one way to help restore ecological balance across the landscape so the area becomes more resilient to threats. 4. A community that has adapted to wildfire is a better-protected community. • When residents of a fire-prone community clear brush, trees and other flammable materials away from their homes and other structures, it helps keep residents and firefighters safe. • Communities, homeowners, and local agencies can take some simple steps to make homes more defensible. • Firefighters appreciate the help given to them by residents who are willing to do their part on private property to reduce risk prior to a fire incident.

For updated news and information, be sure to check out the NIFC PIO Bulletin Board at [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb/main.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/main.html).

**Websites of Interest** View a daily report of wildfire activity in Virginia. Previous day's activity is posted by 10:00 AM each day. <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/sit-rep.shtml> The Nation's Logistical Support Center <http://www.nifc.gov/> Special area of interest Welcome to the PIO Bulletin Board [http://www.nifc.gov/PIO\\_bb.html](http://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb.html) InciWeb is an interagency all-risk incident information management system. The system was developed with two primary missions: 1) Provide the public a single source of incident related information and 2) Provide a standardized reporting tool for the Public Affairs community <http://www.inciweb.org/> Information targeting Communities and Homeowners on how to make their homes and community Firewise! The National Site <http://www.firewise.org/> The State Site <http://www.dof.virginia.gov/fire/firewise-index.htm> or [www.firewisevirginia.org](http://www.firewisevirginia.org)

## Contact Information

Area Department of Forestry Contact: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Office of the Virginia Department of Forestry \_\_\_\_\_  
Virginia Department of Forestry Central Office Contacts:

Director of Resource Protection; John Miller [john.miller@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:john.miller@dof.virginia.gov) 434-220-9023

Assistant Director Resource Protection Fred Turck [fred.turck@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:fred.turck@dof.virginia.gov) 434-220-8052

Director of Public Information John Campbell [john.campbell@dof.virginia.gov](mailto:john.campbell@dof.virginia.gov) 434-220-9070

# National Statistics

Year	Fires	Acres	Forest Service	DOI Agencies	Total
1985	82,591	2,896,147	\$161,505,000	\$78,438,000	\$239,943,000
1986	85,907	2,719,162	\$111,625,000	\$91,153,000	\$202,778,000
1987	71,300	2,447,296	\$253,657,000	\$81,452,000	\$335,109,000
1988	72,750	5,009,290	\$429,609,000	\$149,317,000	\$578,926,000
1989	48,949	1,827,310	\$331,672,000	\$168,115,000	\$499,787,000
1990	66,481	4,621,621	\$253,700,000	\$144,252,000	\$397,952,000
1991	75,754	2,953,578	\$132,300,000	\$73,820,000	\$206,120,000
1992	87,394	2,069,929	\$290,300,000	\$87,166,000	\$377,466,000
1993	58,810	1,797,574	\$184,000,000	\$56,436,000	\$240,436,000
1994	79,107	4,073,579	\$757,200,000	\$161,135,000	\$918,335,000
1995	82,234	1,840,546	\$367,000,000	\$110,126,000	\$477,126,000
1996	96,363	6,065,998	\$547,500,000	\$153,683,000	\$701,183,000
1997	66,196	2,856,959	\$179,100,000	\$105,048,000	\$284,148,000
1998	81,043	1,329,704	\$306,800,000	\$109,904,000	\$416,704,000
1999	92,487	5,626,093	\$361,100,000	\$154,416,000	\$515,516,000
2000	92,250	7,383,493	\$1,076,000,000	\$334,802,000	\$1,410,802,000
2001	84,079	3,570,911	\$683,122,000	\$269,574,000	\$952,696,000
2002	73,457	7,184,712	\$1,279,000,000	\$395,040,000	\$1,674,040,000
2003	63,629	3,960,842	\$1,023,500,000	\$303,638,000	\$1,327,138,000
2004	65,461	8,097,880	\$726,000,000	\$281,244,000	\$1,007,244,000
2005	66,753	8,689,389	\$524,900,000	\$294,054,000	\$818,954,000
2006	96,385	9,873,745	\$1,280,419,000	\$424,058,000	\$1,704,477,000
2007	85,705	9,328,045	\$1,149,654,000	\$470,491,000	\$1,620,145,000
2008	78,979	5,292,468	\$1,193,073,000	\$392,783,000	\$1,585,856,000
2009	78,792	5,921,786	\$702,111,000	\$218,418,000	\$920,529,000
2010	71,971	3,422,724	\$578,285,000	\$231,214,000	\$809,499,000
2011	74,126	8,711,367	\$1,055,736,000	\$318,789,000	\$1,374,525,000
2012	67,774	9,326,238	\$1,436,614,000	\$465,832,000	\$1,902,446,000
2013	47,579	4,319,546	\$1,341,735,000	\$399,199,000	\$1,740,934,000
2014	63,212	3,595,613	\$1,195,955,000	\$326,194,000	\$1,522,149,000
2015	68,151	10,125,149	\$1,713,000,000	\$417,543,000	\$2,130,543,000
2016	67,595	5,503,538	\$1,603,806,000	\$371,739,000	\$1,975,545,000

## Federal Firefighting Costs (Suppression Only)

- The Department of Interior agencies include: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management; National Park Service; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The U.S. Forest Service is an agency of the Department of Agriculture.
- Annual fires and total acres include all private, state and federal lands.
- Costs are not adjusted for inflation.

[WWW.DOF.VIRGINIA.GOV](http://WWW.DOF.VIRGINIA.GOV)



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[WWW.FIREWISEVIRGINIA.ORG](http://WWW.FIREWISEVIRGINIA.ORG)