

Fire officials on heightened alert because of dry conditions

Due to the lack of measurable precipitation and drying north and east winds, all burning in El Dorado and Amador counties have been banned on state responsibility lands until further notice.

“Since this is one of the driest winters on record, we have decided to take this action in order to protect life and property. We have put into place a staffing pattern that maintains one fire engine in each of our divisions and one conservation camp crew in each of our camps 24/7,” Chief Kelly Keenan of the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire said in a release.

The public is being asked to not burn debris piles and check on old debris piles to make sure they are completely out.

“We are seeing escape control burns almost daily due to these extreme weather conditions,” Keenan said.

The U.S. Forest Service has put the fire danger level at moderate – an occurrence almost unheard of in January.

“The overwhelming majority of our wildland fires are human-caused. As usual, the No. 1 cause was illegal or abandoned campfires,” Forest Service spokeswoman Cheva Heck said in a release. “We ask that that people remember that campfires and warming fires generally are not allowed on the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit.”

The chart shows fire stats for the LTBMU for 2011.



The Forest Service this winter has responded to two wildland fires caused by residents dumping woodstove ashes in the forest near their homes.

A couple lost their rental house near Meyers from putting hot ashes on a deck.

Fire agencies recommend placing ashes in a metal container, which should be stored on a non-flammable surface like a concrete walk. They should cool for four days before final disposal

Nevada officials are also worried about fire as precipitation this winter is still non-existent.

Fire agencies usually spend winter months training, maintaining equipment and preparing for the next wildfire season, but so far this winter, wildfires have occurred weekly throughout Nevada.

In 2011, Nevada experienced 814 wildfires and lost approximately 423,768 acres, just shy of the five-year average of 428,084 acres burned.

Conditions are similar to late summer or early fall, and the potential for a rapidly spreading wildfire during daylight hours is high. In several cases, fire behavior has been extreme because of the lack of precipitation, high winds, low humidity and extremely low fuel moisture.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report