

Tips for reducing threat of wildfire ignition

By Brice Bennett

With the passing of the 4th of July, we find ourselves right in the middle of summer here in the Tahoe basin. Locals and visitors alike recreating in many different ways, from camping to mountain biking, to boating, Lake Tahoe has something for everyone.

This summer and particularly this summer due to continued drought conditions, it is important to remember just how fragile the Tahoe basin is, and that there is a persistent threat of wildfire. Everyone needs to take steps to ensure they are being fire smart in everything they do. Doing the right thing, the wrong way can start a wildfire.

When using outdoor powered equipment to clear defensible space, make sure you are using the correct tool for the job. Lawn mowers are for lawns, not dried weeds and brush. A lawn mower with its metal blade can strike rocks or other objects hidden by weeds and create an ignition source that sparks a fire. A weed eater with a non-metal blade or string should be used on this type of dry grass and weeds. This type of work should be done before 10am and never on excessively dry or windy days. Spark arresters are required on all portable gasoline equipment. Perform routine maintenance on your powered equipment to ensure its functioning appropriately and not creating a possible ignition source.

Many people will be towing some sort of recreational equipment this summer, whether it's a kayak behind a small car, or large travel trailer behind a sturdy pickup, there are some simple tips to make sure you are being wildfire safe while towing.

- Trailer safety chains should be the proper length and

not dragging on the ground.

- Your tow vehicle should be properly maintained and up to the task of hauling a heavy load. A malfunctioning exhaust system or catalytic converter can start a fire with ease.
- Maintain proper tire pressure. Driving on exposed wheel rims will throw sparks.
- Carry a fire extinguisher in your vehicle and learn how to safely use it.
- Worn out brakes are not only unsafe, but can throw sparks that can start a fire.
- If you have to pull off the road, make sure you are not stopping on dry grass or brush.

Campfire safety is one of our most important topics. It is imperative that everyone follow the campfire rules for the area that they are planning to have a campfire. Currently the U.S. Forest Service and CalFire have suspended all open burning including camp fires, unless they are within a fire ring in a designated site. Portable gas stoves are allowed in the backcountry so long as they are accompanied by a campfire permit.

Share these simple fire safe tips with your friends in the Tahoe basin, as well as anyone planning on visiting. Only working together can we ensure a wildfire is not started here due to negligence. Over 90 percent of all wildfires are caused by people, so 90 percent of all wildfires are preventable. Remember one less spark, means one less wildfire.

Brice Bennett works for CalFire.