



# Covering Wildfire in Kentucky

## A Guide for News Media

This guide is dedicated to the firefighters throughout Kentucky who risk their lives protecting our state's natural resources. It is presented as a public service for media in Kentucky and other interested organizations by the Kentucky Division of Forestry. For more information, please visit our Web site at <http://forestry.ky.gov>.



### Forest Fire Hazard Seasons

During forest fire hazard seasons, it is illegal to burn between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. within 150 feet of any woodland or brushland.

**Fall Season:  
Begins Oct. 1  
Ends Dec. 15**

**Spring Season:  
Begins Feb. 15  
Ends April 30**

Arson is the leading cause of wildfire in Kentucky.  
To report arson, call: 1-800-27-ARSON

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## Getting the Story



Wildfires and other catastrophes are major news events and attract considerable media attention. The public certainly has a right to information about such incidents; however, access to incidents is often complicated by the urgency and danger of the situation.

Public agencies involved in the suppression of wildland fires invite and appreciate media

coverage. They recognize that media coverage is an integral part of keeping the public informed about wildland fire activities and educated about wildland fire prevention. The primary concern for media on a fire site, however, is that everyone approaches the scene safely and in a manner which does not interfere with suppression efforts.

Wildfire suppression in Kentucky may involve a number of different agencies as well as

rural and city fire departments. The Kentucky Division of Forestry is responsible for protecting state and private forestlands, whereas federal agencies are responsible for protecting federal lands. On larger fires or in areas with multiple fires, these entities often assist one another.

**Current wildfire information available online at:**  
<http://forestry.ky.gov>

## Interagency Cooperation and the Incident Command System

There is no way one agency can fight all the wildland fires that occur in Kentucky. For the past several years, the land management and fire fighting agencies on many different levels of government have worked together under the **Incident Command System** to fight fires and deal with other emergencies as they arise.

The Incident Commander (IC) or other agency personnel are

often available to assist media, however, the IC reserves the right to refuse media if conditions are not safe or if personnel and resources are limited.

Fire Information Officers are trained to assist the media and are often assigned to larger fires or to areas with multiple fires.

*“Fire Information Officers are there to help you get the best possible story.”*

Resource mobilization for larger fires in Kentucky originate at the Kentucky Interagency Coordination Center (KICC) housed at the Daniel Boone National Forest Office in Winchester. The KICC can request additional fire fighting resources through the Southern Area Coordination Center and the National Interagency Fire Center if necessary.

## Who to Contact?

**All news media must notify agency personnel prior to arriving on a fire site.** The Information Officer should always be your “first call” person when a fire breaks. Agencies should also be given adequate time to respond and meet with the media.

**Please contact Kentucky Division of Forestry’s Information Officer at:**  
**627 Comanche Trail**  
**Frankfort, Kentucky**  
**Phone: 1-800-866-0555**  
**<http://forestry.ky.gov>**

**Please contact Daniel Boone National Forest’s Information Officer at:**  
**1700 Bypass Road**  
**Winchester, Kentucky**  
**Phone: 1-859-745-3100**  
**[www.fs.fed.us/r8/boone/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/boone/)**

## How to Get to the Fire Line!

The Fire Information Officer or other agency officials will escort media to the fire line. Usually, there are areas where the media can safely get coverage and video of the scene.

**Location:** Access to wildland fires in Kentucky can be easy or difficult depending on the location and availability of access roads. The key to finding the fire is to contact the

Information Officer before you start chasing smoke columns.

**Equipment:** All firefighters are required to wear personal protective equipment while out on the line. Media is no different. Most synthetic clothing is not fire retardant, likewise, some hairsprays and makeup may be flammable. Therefore, the following protective gear is required and usually available

for the media at the scene:

- A hard hat
- Nomex fire resistant pants and shirt
- Gloves
- An escort to the fire line (depending on hazards and availability of personnel).

It is also recommended that the media wear 8-inch leather hiking boots.

## How About a Plane Ride?



A question that is often asked is “Can we get a ride up in one of your planes for some aerial shots?” The

answer is NO—by Federal regulation only persons who are essential for the mission are allowed on these flights.

Additionally, any aerial access to a fire must be cleared in advance. Pre-approved flyovers

can usually be arranged, but they must be coordinated with the Incident Commander first. Pilots should be aware of FAA flight restrictions under 91.137a.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Q. What are the laws in Kentucky regarding wildfire and outdoor burning?

**A.** The Kentucky Division of Forestry is the state agency responsible for suppressing wildfires and enforcing forest fire hazard season laws on state and private lands. Additional outdoor burning laws and restrictions may apply through the Kentucky Division for Air Quality, local ordinances and/or county burn bans.

### Q. How are wildfires put out?

**A.** Three things 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, the fire’s fuel. Fire is sometimes smothered with dirt to remove its oxygen supply. Water and retardant may be also used to cool flames and remove heat.

### Q. What is a backfire?

**A.** Firefighters will sometimes set a fire along the inner edge of a control line to consume the fuel in the path of a wildland fire and to aid in the construction of control lines.



## Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

**Q. What's the difference between "containing" 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. 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 line "contained". After containing a fire, the next step is to get it under control.

**Q. What's 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* or *controlled burn* is one that is

started intentionally by qualified, trained personnel in order to reduce fuel loads or to use as a management technique. Like a doctor's prescription, there are specific conditions which must be met before a prescribed fire is set, including favorable temperatures, low winds and optimum humidity.

**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.

**Q. What are some of the dangers of wildfire that the public should know about?**

**A.** Wildfire is destructive to forests and other natural resources. It can also be a serious threat to the public. Lives, homes and property may be threatened in the path of

wildfire, however, smoke from wildfire also presents a problem. Small particles found in wildfire smoke can create breathing difficulties especially for children, the elderly and those with respiratory problems. Thick layers of smoke also increase traffic hazards by reducing visibility.

**Q. What are some outdoor burning precautions ?**

**A.** Safety precautions should always be taken into consideration when burning woody debris or using campfires. Weather conditions are a contributing factor in the number and intensity of wildfires, therefore, outdoor burning should only occur when the wind is calm and the humidity is high. Other precautions include keeping brush piles and campfires small and contained, keeping a supply of water and a shovel accessible and staying with the fire until it is completely extinguished.

### Other questions often asked by media:

- **What caused the fire?**
- **What size is the fire or how many acres have burned?**
- **When do officials plan to have the fire controlled?**
- **What precautions should the public take?**
- **Are there any structures or homes threatened?**
- **How are fire regulations enforced?**
- **How are fire suppression fees collected?**



## 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 firefighters 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. The fuel type is 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. The reason for such burning is to produce the intensity of heat and rate of spread required to attain a planned resource management objective such as reducing the amount of old, dead logging slash that might fuel a major wildland fire.

**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.