



News Release

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AMENDED OUTDOOR BURNING LAW

Lexington County Council on Tuesday, May 22 amended the Lexington County Outdoor Burning Ordinance to prohibit the open burning of leaves, tree branches and yard trimmings at private residences within 75 feet of any structure and within 75 feet of any property line. The amended law, which takes effect on July 1, also requires citizens who burn debris outdoors to take adequate steps to prevent any outdoor fire from spreading within 75 feet of any structure.

Lexington County Assistant Sheriff for Public Safety Bruce E. Rucker said the amended law requires open burning that is done for the purpose of clearing land or maintaining a right-of-way to be conducted in compliance with South Carolina air quality regulations. Such open burning will be prohibited between April 1 and October 30, when air quality problems are most prevalent in Lexington County.

County Council amended the county outdoor burning law in order to enhance the county's compliance with state and federal air quality standards, Rucker said. Outdoor burning can cause air quality in Lexington County to deteriorate significantly. The amended law will greatly reduce the amount of open burning that occurs in residential subdivisions in the fast-growing county.

Property owners must notify the South Carolina Forestry Commission before burning yard debris, such as leaves. They can call the Lexington County forestry office at 1-800-705-8613.

In 2005, the Lexington County Fire Service responded to 672 calls for service that involved woods fires and outdoor debris fires, Rucker said. From January 2006 through March 2007, the Fire Service responded to 1,077 calls for service that involved woods fires and outdoor debris fires.

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Citizens who do not follow fire-safety procedures and who do not comply with the county outdoor burning ordinance can endanger lives and property when they improperly burn yard debris outdoors, Rucker said. The county law restricts outdoor burning, in part, because unrestricted outdoor burning can violate state and federal air-quality standards.

“Low humidity, dry ground cover and high winds can create ideal conditions for woods fires,” Rucker said. “Citizens should exercise extreme caution when they burn fires outdoors.”

Under the county outdoor burning law, smoke from an outdoor fire must be ended and no additional combustible material can be added to the fire between the official sunset for the day when the fire was ignited and the official sunrise for the following day. The law does not apply to fires that are burned for recreational or ceremonial purposes, fires that are burned for human warmth and fires that are burned to immediately prepare food. The law applies only in unincorporated areas of the county.

The outdoor burning law requires property owners to constantly attend outdoor fires and fully extinguish fires. Property owners must have a garden hose connected to a water supply or fire extinguishing equipment readily available for use in the event that an outdoor fire begins to burn out of control.

Outdoor fires must be burned in compliance with South Carolina laws and regulations, which prohibit outdoor burning of household garbage, tires, chemicals, plastic materials, metals, dead animals, treated wood, cardboard, petroleum products and construction debris, Rucker said.

The county outdoor burning law does not apply to debris burning that is related to forestry, wildlife and agricultural practices, Rucker said. It also does not apply to open fires that are used for recreational purposes or for the immediate preparation of food.

The coordinator of the Lexington County Fire Service can prohibit outdoor burning in the county whenever weather conditions and other factors make outdoor burning hazardous, Rucker said. Citizens who violate the county outdoor burning law are guilty of a misdemeanor that carries a maximum punishment of 30 days in jail.
