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KDHE and KDA recommend voluntary reduction in burning

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic currently impacting all states, including Kansas, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Kansas Department of Agriculture strongly encourage all land owners and managers to voluntarily reduce the number of acres that they intend to burn this spring.

“With the potential for this pandemic overwhelming the state’s medical facilities, any additional respiratory concerns that could be produced from breathing smoke from prescribed fire need to be mitigated,” Dr. Lee Norman, KDHE Secretary, said.

Common health problems related to smoke can include burning eyes, runny nose, coughing and illnesses such as bronchitis. Individuals with respiratory issues, including COVID-19, pre-existing heart or lung diseases, children and the elderly may experience worse symptoms.

With resources of the county emergency response staff already being taxed with COVID-19 response, it is important to minimize responses that would come with prescribed fire activity.

It is critical that land managers in areas included in the Smoke Model available online at ksfire.org consult the model if they do choose to burn. The model indicates the level at which a burn would contribute to urban area air quality problems. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Beam urges land managers to refrain from burning, especially if your area is predicted in the large (red) contribution range.

“Prescribed burning is a valuable land management tool in the efforts to fight invasive species and maximize land productivity, and this request should not be interpreted as an indictment of the practice of burning,” Beam said. “However, the circumstances surrounding the coronavirus pandemic have created a situation that calls for reducing burned acres this spring.”

For the latest information related to COVID-19, and to sign up for daily updates sent to your email inbox, visit the Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s COVID-19 Resource Center at www.kdheks.gov/coronavirus.

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