

The fall forest fire season is underway in West Virginia. It began Saturday with new burning hours and enhanced penalties for those who start forest fires.

Div. of Forestry spokesperson Leslie Fitzwater says outdoor burning can only take place between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m. The old burning period began at 4 o'clock. She says the Division of Forestry believes the one hour adjustment will help.

"Fire danger is more prevalent in the afternoon and that's because that's when the temperatures heat up, the winds are a little stronger and the humidity is lower," Fitzwater said.

State lawmakers also approved a proposal earlier this year to increase the maximum fine for starting a forest fire from \$350 to \$1,000. Fitzwater says county magistrates will have the option of fining those responsible for allowing their fires to escape anywhere between \$100 and \$1,000. There's an additional new civil penalty of \$200.

Fitzwater says 99 percent of forest fires are caused by residents and many of them by fires planned by residents but then just get away from them. She says the Div. of Forestry needs the assistance of the public.

"Don't burn on windy days. Take into consideration if it's too try you can always wait to burn that pile," she said. "Just help us to help you keep the forest safe and don't burn until after 5 p.m."

The burning hours remain in effect through Dec. 31.

A commercial burning permit costs \$125 and is available through the local Div. of Forestry office.

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