

Even after the line of storms that rolled through Scott County on Sunday evening, the drought that has affected crops, yards, flowers and foliage is still not quite over.

Because of that fact, and because fireworks are traditionally used to celebrate the nation's Independence Day, Scott County Commissioners and local fire chiefs have kept the outside burn ban in effect. Commissioners will be addressing the matter at their planned meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 5.

Through most of June, trees shed leaves, crops' leaves "spiked" and lawns browned, all thanks to high pressure zones stagnating over Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio and Illinois that prolonged clear skies and record 100-plus temperatures.

At a recent meeting, Scott County Commissioners Mark Hays, Bob Tobias and Larry Blevins discussed the drought conditions being experienced in an unusually-dry June. A "state of emergency" burning ban proclamation was drawn up and readied for their signatures if appreciable rain did not fall.

Since long-range weather forecasts released on June 25 indicated little or no rain in sight, the disaster emergency proclamation restricting outdoor burning in the county was put into action that Monday. On June 26, a statement was released, advising, "Scott County Commissioners and Scott County Fire Chiefs are strongly encouraging residents to attend public displays of fireworks (on or about July 4) and limit their personal use of fireworks."

That probably has put a bit of a crimp in people's plans for today's observance of Independence Day, but better that than dealing with life- and property-threatening, out-of-control field fires.

Anyone with a lawn knows how "crunchy" most of the grass is right now. If grass gets sun all

day long, odds are the tips if not most of each grass plant has been affected. An out-of-control fire can "dance" on dried grass tips, the wind pushing it quickly across a lawn or field and allowing it to spread and threaten buildings and people.

Regardless of all that heavy rain that fell Sunday night, roadside brush and lawns still have a lot of flammable material available. High temperatures on following days have helped to dry out the landscape. Smokers should take care when extinguishing cigarettes. In other words, don't throw butts out the car window.

The Commissioners' emergency proclamation states that officials find the drought conditions allow the county to be at risk of widespread fire hazards.

Effective until further notice, the following activities are prohibited in Scott County:

- Campfires and other recreational fires, unless such fires are enclosed in a fire ring with dimensions of (at least) 23 inches in diameter by 10 inches higher or larger.

- Open burning of any kind using conventional fuel such as wood, or other combustible material, with the exception of grills fueled by charcoal briquettes or propane.

- Burning of debris, such as timber vegetation, including such debris that results from building construction activities.

Burning is allowed from dawn to dusk only in so-called "burn barrels" which have a 1/4-inch mesh top. Burn barrels are allowed in the county but not in the cities of Austin and Scottsburg.

Charcoal from permitted grills cannot be removed from grills until it has been thoroughly extinguished.

Sunday rains helped but outside fire ban still in effect; use of fireworks discouraged

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Commissioners will revisit the drought situation Thursday night as conditions continue to see if more stringent restrictions are needed or if the ban can be lifted.