

Office of Mayor Annise Parker



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City of Houston News Release

Office of Mayor Annise Parker

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People Protecting Our Parks

Mayor Annise Parker Announces New Fire Safety Campaign for City Parks

Mayor Annise Parker, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD) and the Houston Fire Department (HFD) announced People Protecting Our Parks, a new campaign that calls on Houstonians to proactively protect the City's parklands during the ongoing drought. The campaign has two main goals: fire prevention education and the protection of public parklands. The first step in this campaign is the issuance of a temporary ban on all barbecue pits in City of Houston Parks.

"Houstonians always respond to calls for help during times of need. People Protecting Our Parks is our call for help to everyone who loves our parks, green spaces and trees," said Mayor Parker. "We ask all Houstonians to join with us to help prevent fires in our city parks. We are already facing the loss of thousands of our trees simply because they won't survive the stress of the drought. I can't imagine losing thousands more trees, or possibly an entire section of one of our beautiful parks, simply because we failed to protect them from fire."

"We have seen wildfire tragedies all across our great state this past week. Our hearts go out to everyone who has been affected by them," said Houston Parks and Recreation Director Joe Turner. "With HPD's assistance, we made an aerial fly-over of our park system on Wednesday to assess the condition of our urban forest and get a clearer understanding of what we as a city were facing due to this unprecedented drought. As a result of that assessment and the predictions we're hearing about the drought and the wildfire situations all across our state, we decided it is necessary to temporarily ban the use of barbecue pits and grills in all City of Houston Parks."

The temporary ban on barbecue pits will remain in effect until further notice. Signage notifying the public about the ban will be placed in the parks. To allow for a period of public education, warnings will be issued to violators until City Council adopts a permanent enforcement mechanism next week.

"The City of Houston has seen more than its share of grass and woodland fires, with 160 fires since the beginning of September, compared to nine the same time last year," reported Houston Fire Chief Terry Garrison. "The Houston Fire Department is reminding citizens to be extra vigilant in activities that can lead to accidental fires, including the use of barbecues at home and smoking materials. We join Mayor Parker and HPARD in recognizing that our citizens can have the greatest positive impact on the safety of our parks by foregoing the use of barbecue grills right now."

HFD recommends the following safety tips during this drought:

Barbecue Safety

- Portable barbecue pits, charcoal grills and other open-flame cooking devices outside of a building should not be operated on combustible balconies or located within 10 feet of combustible walls or roofs or other combustible materials.
- When igniting the barbecue charcoal, use a charcoal lighter, not gasoline. Gasoline can flash violently in and around the pit causing serious injuries to anyone in the area of the flash. A fire extinguisher or charged garden hose should be handy while the fire is burning. Check the pit frequently to ensure that it is okay.
- Hot ash and coals from barbecue pits and charcoal burners should be placed in a non-combustible container until cooled or thoroughly saturated with water, before being disposed.

Open Flames

- The City of Houston Fire Code prohibits all open-burning within the Houston city limits at all times. The burn ban in unincorporated areas of Harris County also prohibits any outdoor open-burning, including the burning of: a bonfire, rubbish fire, campfire, trench fire, or other fire in an outdoor location when not contained.

Vehicles, Trailers and Tools

- Park vehicles so that the exhaust system does not come in contact with dry grass, leaves, or weeds.
- Adjust the safety chains on trailers to ensure they don't drag and create sparks that can cause roadside starts.
- Keep lawn mowers and agricultural equipment in proper working condition and avoid rocks and other materials which might cause a spark.
- Do not weld or cut without a spotter, a water source and a shovel.
- Notify the electric power company when dead trees or overhanging limbs endanger the electric wires. The wires may touch each other or the ground, causing sparks that start fires.

Cigarettes or Other Smoking Materials

- Another cause of accidental fires is carelessly discarded cigarettes or other smoking materials. They can smolder for hours and should be completely doused with water before being discarded in a safe manner, rather than tossed out a window or on the ground.
- Texas' arson law includes felony punishment for anyone whose cigarette recklessly sets fire to a building or injures anyone. Arson is a second-degree felony in Texas, punishable by up to 20 years in prison, but if a person is hurt or killed or if the fire involves a church, arson is a first-degree felony, carrying possible punishment of up to life in prison.

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