

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 21, 2017

Contact: Matt Keith
785-296-5795
Matt.Keith@ks.gov

Health Advisory, Safety Tips Issued During Flint Hills Burning Season *Smoke Modeling Tool Active Beginning March 1*

TOPEKA, Kan. – The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) reminds Kansans that March and April are a time when large areas of the state’s Flint Hills rangeland are burned. These burns help preserve the tallgrass prairie, control invasive species such as Eastern Red Cedar and Sumac and provide better forage for cattle. Prescribed burning minimizes risk of wildfires and is effective in managing rangeland resources. Smoke from the burns can influence the air quality of downwind areas. The use of smoke management techniques is vital to reduce impacts.

KDHE will activate the Kansas smoke modeling tool on March 1, prior to widespread burning in the Flint Hills. On average there are approximately 2.3 million acres burned in the Flint Hills of Kansas and Oklahoma each year.

For burns to be safe and effective, weather and rangeland conditions must be ideal. Many landowners will burn at the same time when such conditions are met. Air pollutants from the burns can affect persons in the Flint Hills and can be carried long distances to more populated areas.

“We encourage ranchers and land managers to take advantage of this smoke modeling resource to spread out their burns more effectively and mitigate potential air quality impacts,” said Douglas Watson, meteorologist, KDHE, Bureau of Air.

Prescribed burns release large amounts of particulate matter (PM) and substances that can form ozone. Particulate matter and ozone can cause health problems, even in healthy individuals. Common health problems include burning eyes, runny nose, coughing and illnesses such as bronchitis. Individuals with respiratory issues, pre-existing heart or lung diseases, children and elderly may experience worse symptoms.

Steps to protect your health on days when smoke is present in your community include:

- Healthy people should limit or avoid strenuous outdoor exercise.
- People with respiratory or heart related illnesses should remain indoors.
- Help keep indoor air clean by closing doors and windows and running air conditioners with air filters.
- Keep hydrated by drinking lots of water.
- Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath or severe fatigue.

For more information about the burning in the Flint Hills, the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan, the April burn restrictions and the smoke modeling tool, please visit www.ksfire.org.

###

At KDHE, our mission is to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans.