

Recommendation 344
Prescribed Fires

Background:

Smoke emanating from forest fires can affect your health based on numerous factors, including length of time exposed to the fire, how much air you breath, overall general health, and, concentration of smoke in the air. Smoke is made-up of several components, and the unhealthiest material in wildland fire smoke are the small particles, which make it challenging to breath, and especially challenging for those who have existing heart and lung conditions.ⁱ

When some is present, AirNow recommends limiting outdoor activities; staying inside and keeping windows and doors closed; keeping air systems on “re-circulate”; and, checking local programs for updates.

The Forest Service at the Savannah River Site had:

- 68 burn days in 2012
- 80 burn days in 2013
- 35 burn days in 2014
- 60 burn days in 2015
- 48 burn days in 2016

These days amounted to a total of 115,874 acres burned during prescribed burns.

The Forest Service manages prescribed fires and, some wildfires, to benefit natural resources and reduce the risk of unwanted wildfires in the futureⁱⁱ.

Prescribed burns are helpful as they:

- Reduce hazardous fuels, protecting human communities from extreme fires;
- Minimize the spread of pest insects and disease;
- Remove unwanted species that threaten species native to an ecosystem;
- Provide forage for game;
- Improve habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Recycle nutrients back to the soil; and
- Promote the growth of trees, wildflowers, and other plants;

Surrounding the Savannah River Site are several communities and towns where people have the chance of being exposed to smoke from these prescribed burns.

Recommendation:

The Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board recommends that the Department of Energy:

1. Work with the Forest Service to create a notification system for individuals, businesses, schools, hospitals, media and local government of prescribed burn days that can be shared on social media and the SRS website to alert residents of potential smoke.
2. Work with the Forest Service to distribute a calendar of prescribed burn days at local community events, including at the SRS CAB meetings.

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Adopted May 23, 2017
Sponsored by the Strategic & Legacy Management Committee

ⁱ <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/environmentalhealth/smoke.html>.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.fs.fed.us/fire/management/rx.html>