

Period of extreme fire danger continues

BY DEBBIE KELLEY
debbie.kelley@gazette.com

ENGLEWOOD • Windy, dry, warm weather Tuesday is expected to create a tinderbox of extreme fire danger.

Coloradans must do their part to prevent fires from escalating out of control heading into summer, state fire officials emphasized at a Friday briefing in Englewood.

"The overwhelming majority of fires in Colorado are caused by man — human action or inaction," said Mike Morgan, director of the Col-

"The overwhelming majority of fires in Colorado are caused by man — human action or inaction."

Mike Morgan, Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control

orado Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

"We're all in this together," Morgan said. "It starts with that personal responsibility and accountability."

So be vigilant about activities that could spark a fire, the experts said.

Gov. John Hickenlooper said people must heed fire restrictions and bans.

"If it's dry outside, don't start a fire," Hickenlooper said.

El Paso County is under Stage 1 fire restrictions, which prohibit open fire

and burning, except fires and campfires within permanently constructed fire grates, charcoal grills and wood-burning stoves in developed campgrounds and picnic grounds or in private homes.

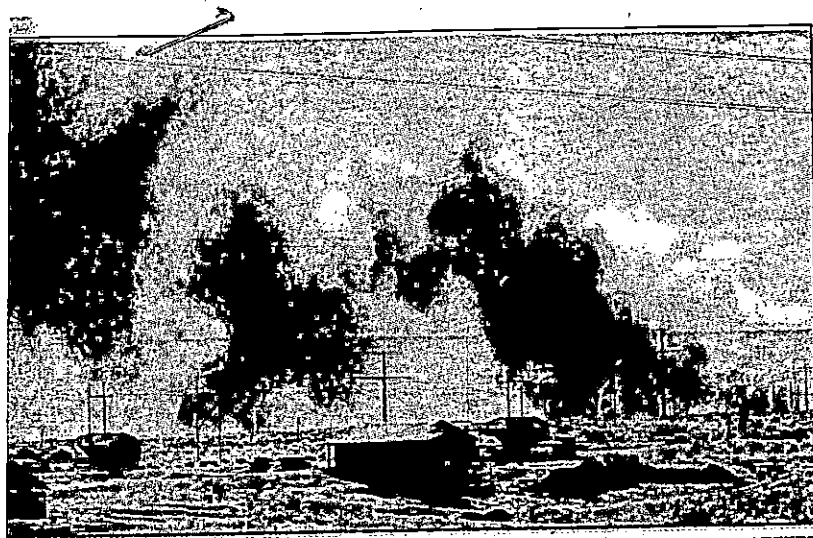
The rules also bar sale or

use of fireworks, outdoor smoking except in a closed vehicle or building or in a 3-foot area barren of flammable materials.

Tuesday is yet another "red flag warning" day for southern Colorado, meaning critical dry fuels, low relative humidity, strong winds and warm weather are occurring or expected to occur.

"Conditions will be favorable for the rapid ignition, growth and spread of fires" whenever a red flag warning

SEE FIRES • PAGE 5



Black smoke from the Carson Midway wildfire billows behind homes visible just past the Pikes Peak International Raceway in March just outside Fountain.

DOUGAL BROWNLIE, THE GAZETTE

FIRES

FROM PAGE 3

is issued, the National Weather Service reported.

A big no-no is tossing cigarette butts out car windows or while walking outside. That seems like a no-brainer, but it happens every day everywhere, said Colorado Springs Fire Capt. Brian Vaughan.

That's what caused a fire that burned 386 acres in Falcon off east U.S. 24 on April 2.

Investigators searched a 40-square-foot area to determine the fire's origin and found "25 cigarette butts in that triangle, and at least that many or more in sections all along Highway 24," Vaughan said.

Firefighters also found about 200 cigarette butts in a 10-square-foot area near a small fire that broke out last week on the railroad tracks near Fillmore Street and Sinton Road, he said.

"While there are many heat sources, cigarettes are certainly something we can control more than anything," he said.

Use an ashtray with a safety lid, he said.

Other mishaps are not as obvious.

A cigarette discarded in a planter of dry mulch caused another recent local fire that spread into a townhome complex, destroying 20 units.

"Not only are the grasses and trees and brush more dry, so are our homes, sidings, stud framings, roofs, and we have fires starting outside and going inside because of cigarettes, which is an immediate threat to life," Vaughan said.

Potting soil is combustible because it is made of wood, plastic, peat moss and other materials that can "easily light on fire," Vaughan said. "All firefighters in the city have run across one of those types of fires."

Other risky activities to avoid include:

- Parking hot vehicles on

grassy land. Vehicle components can reach temperatures of 1,000 degrees F. or more. "It doesn't take much to light grass when it gets that dry," Vaughan said.

- Lawnmower blades and other yard tools hitting rocks.
- Trailer safety chains dragging on the ground.

• Shooting guns. Shell casings hitting rocks and grass can smolder and, "We're off and running with a fire," Vaughan said.

- Barbecuing. Grills should be kept at least 10 feet from homes and other structures.

• Lighting fireworks. They're illegal in city limits year-round, and county sales and use vary by year, depending on fire conditions. Users can be fined.

In Friday's briefing, Hicken looper beseeched residents in the urban-wildland interface or near trees or vegetation to create fuel-free, defensible spaces around their home to give firefighters a chance should a blaze break out in their neighborhood.