

Forest Service, Seattle Fire Department report 'significant increase' in human-caused fires

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A "significant increase" in wildfires has been caused by humans in National Forest lands in Oregon and Washington this year, according to

the U.S. Forest Service.

Between June 1 and July 28, 197 human-caused or undetermined-caused fire starts have been reported; the total number of fires in 2023 wasn't immediately available. In 2022, 409 human-caused fires were reported in Oregon and Washington Forest Service land. In 2021, 494 were reported.

"The reasons behind this increase are unknown, but human-caused fires are preventable," the agency said in a news release.

In Seattle, the Seattle Fire Department responded to 298 brush and bark fires in July, far more than the 113 brush fire responses in July 2022.

Public lands in the U.S. are managed by several state, local and federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, the National Parks Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Officials warn the wildfire season in the Pacific Northwest could be worse than anywhere else in the nation. In June, the National Interagency Fire Center's wildfire outlook showed all of Washington with above-normal fire potential from July through September.

Since Aug. 16, the Forest Service has issued restrictions on all campfires, smoking and other activities in forests. All campfires, charcoal or pellet fires are prohibited even in developed campgrounds. Portable cooking stoves and heating devices using bottled fuel are still allowed.

Local officials in Seattle have also stressed the importance in preventing brush fires within city limits as vegetation dries out. Here are some tips from the Seattle Fire Department:

How to ward off weather-related fires near homes:

- Remove dead plants such as bushes or weeds as soon as possible.
- Clear pine needles and leaves from roofs and gutters.
- Consider removing long grass, weeds or tree limbs that touch the building or hang nearby.
- Keep lawns watered or cut short.
- Remove flammable wood piles or propane tanks.
- Do not light fireworks.

How to avoid starting a brush fire:

- Dispose of smoking materials in proper receptacles and douse them in water. Don't throw cigarettes in planters or out vehicle windows.
- Check whether chains or other metal parts are dragging from vehicles because they can create sparks.
- Keep tires inflated, since an exposed wheel rim can also cause sparks.
- Be careful when parked or driving through dry grass. Exhaust pipes can also cause fires.

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