

## **THE 2011 WILD FIRE SEASON HAS BEGUN**

Most people look forward to spring, however there's a downside especially for firefighters. Before trees, fields and forests come alive with new growth there's a period of time between late March and mid May when vegetation is extremely dry and conditions are ripe for fires. Of course this isn't the only time wild fires can occur. The threat can return during prolonged dry periods in the summer and fall.

Carelessness is the principle contributing factor to most wild fires. This includes but isn't limited to the improper discarding of cigarettes, unattended burn barrels, vegetation & brush piles which are too large or lit when weather conditions are windy and dry, as well as the improper extinguishment and disposal of ashes from campfires, fireplaces, stoves and barbecue's.

To paraphrase Smokey Bear "Only you can prevent wild fires". By taking some common sense precautions, the number of wild fires occurring in Columbia County each year could be greatly reduced. The following are a few facts everyone should know about open burning:

- The PA Department of Environmental Resources restricts open burning to household trash generated in single or two family structures only. The burning of construction material is not permitted.
- When burning brush or vegetation, the fire must not extend beyond the land where the burning originated. Fires should be small enough to control and ensure emissions do not interfere with the reasonable enjoyment of life and property by others.
- When state fire resources are called to assist with extinguishing a wild fire, the responsible party could receive a bill for services. Charges may be substantial especially if aircraft are used to fight the fire.
- Municipal elected officials can issue temporary or permanent open burning ordinances which regulate or prevent open burning in their jurisdiction. Those who violate local ordinances could be subject to fines.

So before you light that burn barrel or brush pile make sure local regulations permit it, check the weather, place a spark arrestor screen on top of the burn barrels, have a charged garden hose close by and make sure the fire is monitored from the time it's lit until the last coal is extinguished.