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Burn only natural brush, officials warn

A burn ban that had been in place since June 6 was lifted yesterday by the Caldwell County judge after officials determined recent rainfall and other factors had improved conditions enough to allow outdoor burning.

But as individuals begin to clean up their properties, officials with Caldwell County Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the Caldwell County Environmental Enforcement Unit are cautioning them to both take it slowly and make sure they're familiar with what they can and cannot burn.

"The only thing you can burn is brush – natural brush," said Hector Rangel, Chief Emergency Management Coordinator for Caldwell County.

Alberto Luna, an investigator for the Caldwell County Environmental Enforcement Unit, wants to clear up misconceptions about what is allowable to burn. He also said he wants to remind volunteer fire departments in Caldwell County to notify his unit when they respond to a fire.

"There is difference between violating a burn ban and illegally burning items," Luna explained. "We've seen people trying to burn tires, treated wood, plastic and furniture. It's important to bring our unit in because it might not just be a burn ban violation. There could be evidence of illegally dumping materials and illegal burning."

Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator Hank Alex reminded residents to keep their piles manageable when burning natural vegetation.

"Don't burn numerous piles at once," he warned. "If you're lighting two piles at once, you're setting yourself up to be vulnerable."

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) sets the rules for what can be burned when outdoor burning is permitted. Full brochures are available in English (<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/publications/gi/burning-questions-gi-415.pdf>) and in Spanish (<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/publications/gi/burning-questions-gi-415esp.pdf>).

Prohibited items include:

- Electrical insulation
- Tires

- Treated lumber (such as in construction or demolition waste)
- Heavy oils or asphalt materials
- Potentially explosive materials or chemicals

The TCEQ's dos and don'ts of outdoor burning include:

- Check with your local officials to make sure that burning is not against any local law, such as a city ordinance. Make sure that a burn ban is not in place for your area (to prevent wildfires, counties often ban burning during dry weather) by checking the county website at co.caldwell.tx.us. Contact Caldwell County Director of Sanitation Kasi Miles at (512) 398-1803 to file an application for special burning permits during burn bans.
- Don't create a traffic hazard: make sure that smoke doesn't blow across roads.
- Don't burn trash or anything else from a business.
- Don't cause a nuisance: make sure you don't smoke out your neighbors.
- Don't burn anything during a Burn Ban or during a Red Flag Warning.