

Ontario Ready to Respond to Wildland Fire Season

Measures in place to strengthen emergency preparedness while protecting fire fighters from COVID-19

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TORONTO —The Ontario government has taken additional steps to protect people and property during the wildland fire season, including an increase in base funding for emergency forest firefighting by \$30.2 million, and ensuring safety measures are in place to protect Ontario's highly trained fire rangers from COVID-19.

At 12:01 a.m. on May 16, 2020, Ontario is lifting the Restricted Fire Zone (RFZ) designation that was put in place last month across Ontario's fire region. The province will continue to assess forest fire hazard conditions and an RFZ designation may be reinstated in higher risk areas if conditions deteriorate. These restrictions are put in place in order to reduce the number of preventable human-caused fires and lower the risk of wildfires impacting the public.

To help stop the spread of COVID-19 fire rangers will be required to follow the health and safety guidelines recommended by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, such as physical distancing, frequent hand washing, and daily self-assessments by staff.

"This is an extraordinary period. As we put measures in place to protect our staff and the public from the pandemic, we have been taking additional steps to prepare for the wildland fire season," said John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. "Nothing is more important than protecting the safety of people and communities across the province. Although we want people to enjoy themselves, lifting the Restricted Fire Zone designation does not mean we can let our guard down when it comes to preventing human-caused forest fires."

The province has also implemented a more aggressive approach to fighting wildland fires this season with a focus on detecting fires early, combating them with full force and keeping them as small as possible.

"Despite the challenges of these unprecedented times, Ontario's emergency management personnel have been proactively working with partners to prepare for potential evacuations due to the wildland fire season," said Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General. "Public safety remains our top priority and our Provincial Emergency Operations Centre will continue to monitor forest fire

situations with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and be ready to coordinate a response if called upon for evacuation assistance."

QUICK FACTS

- Human-caused fires represent approximately 50 per cent of wildland fires that occur in Ontario each year.
- So far this year, Ontario has had 37 wildland fires burning 93 hectares. This is below the 10-year average of 114 wildland fires and 8,260 hectares burned to date.
- Before starting an outdoor fire, please check with your local municipality to see if a local fire ban is still in effect.

LEARN MORE

- For information about the current forest fire danger, forest fire activity and fire restrictions across the province, visit ontario.ca/forestfires.
- Learn how to prevent fires while fishing, hunting, camping or hiking outdoors by visiting ontario.ca/page/how-prevent-forest-fires.
- Learn about how Ontario is supporting people, businesses and families during COVID-19 by visiting www.ontario.ca/coronavirus.

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