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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DRY CONDITIONS PERSIST; CITIZENS, VISITORS ENCOURAGED TO PRACTICE FIRE SAFETY

Below-average rainfall over the last few months has fire officials in Volusia County on alert for possible brush fires and encouraging citizens to practice fire safety. Officials warn the torrential rain from Tropical Storm Fay a few months ago only offset the drought the area was already experiencing.

“Even with Fay, Volusia County received less than average rainfall in 2008, and much of that deficit came after Fay,” said Division Chief Jamey Burnsed, Volusia County Fire Services wildfire specialist. “What we are experiencing are the cumulative effects of drought that were postponed by the activity from the tropics last year. If we do not get a significant amount of rain over an extended period of time to help ease these dry conditions, we may find the need to enact a burn ban.”

Currently in Volusia County two small wildfires being monitored and actively fought when they flare up, according to Burnsed. Volusia County’s average drought index is 574. However, in some areas of the county the index is as high as 746. (The drought index is on a scale of 1 to 800 – with one being saturation and 800 being desert dry.)

“Homeowners can take several steps to protect their property from brush fires,” said Burnsed. “And, with the upcoming Speedweeks, Bike Week and other activities in Volusia County, we want to make sure visitors also are aware of the situation and practice fire safety.”

Safety tips include:

- Do not discard cigarettes from moving vehicles; use ashtrays.

- When pulling off the side of the road, stay off dry grass areas.
- Do not operate all-terrain vehicles on dry vegetation areas.
- Check lawnmowers and farm equipment for properly working spark arresters.
- Properly extinguish fires when cooking outdoors and never leave fires unattended.
- People start most wildfires. Promote and practice fire safety with all members of your family. If you see a suspicious fire or smoke, call 911.
- Clearly mark all driveway entrances with name and address.
- Plan several escape routes away from your home by car and on foot.

Protect your home

- Design and landscape your home with wildfire safety in mind. Allow a 30-foot buffer of non-combustible material around your home.
- Use non-combustible materials on the roof and regularly clean the roof and gutters.
- Teach family members how to use a fire extinguisher. Install and regularly test smoke detectors.
- Inspect chimneys twice a year and clean them once a year.
- Rake leaves and dead limbs and twigs. Clear all flammable vegetation.
- Have a garden hose long enough to reach any area of your home and property.

When brush fire threatens

- Listen to the news media or your NOAA Weather Alert radio for Civil Emergency Messages about where the danger is.
- Prepare your family, pets, and supplies in case you have to evacuate.
- If told to evacuate, DO SO IMMEDIATELY.
- Tell someone you are leaving and where you are going.
- If evacuating, drive a route away from fire hazards and listen to public safety officials.