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Friday, May 22, 2020

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Twelve Alabama Counties Under Burn Ban to Protect Air Quality

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Alabama Department of Environmental Management recently announced that 12 Alabama counties are now under an annual warm weather ban on open burning as part of the effort to protect air quality in areas of the state that have had a history of air pollution problems.

The burn ban runs from May 1 through Oct. 31 each year and covers Baldwin, DeKalb, Etowah, Jefferson, Lawrence, Madison, Mobile, Montgomery, Morgan, Russell, Shelby and Talladega counties. Its purpose is to combat the formation of ground-level ozone and the generation of fine particulate matter during warm weather months.

“Prohibiting the open burning of wood, tree trimmings, brush and debris generated by land clearing and construction or demolition activities is an effective way to reduce the formation of ground-level ozone, which is formed when volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides react in the presence of heat and sunlight,” said Ron Gore, chief of ADEM’s Air Division. Though beneficial in the upper atmosphere, ozone is a respiratory irritant when found at ground level.

State law says “only vegetation and untreated wood” can be burned, according to Gore. Non-vegetative materials, such as oils, plastics, vinyl, paper, garbage, trash and treated and painted wood, cannot be burned anywhere in the state at any time, he said.

The burn ban is one of many efforts the ADEM uses to maintain air quality in Alabama. The environmental programs administered by ADEM under the federal Clean Air Act support the overarching goal of ensuring that all Alabama citizens have clean air to breath.

Gore also pointed out that the 12-county burn ban enacted by ADEM is separate from the no-burn orders that are declared by the Alabama Forestry Commission to reduce the dangers of wildfires during dry periods. After rains and cooler temperatures this week, the Forestry Commission downgraded a no-burn order it had issued for counties in north Alabama to a fire alert, and removed a no-burn order issued for counties in south Alabama. A fire alert means the Forestry Commission restricts issuing permits for outdoor burning.

For more information about the burn ban, go to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management website, www.adem.alabama.gov.

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