



Loudoun County, Virginia
Department of Fire, Rescue, and Emergency Management



P O Box 7100
801 Sycolin Road SE, Suite 200
Leesburg, VA 20177-7100
Phone 703-777-0333 Fax 703-771-5359

For Additional Information:

Firefighter Laura Rinehart, Public Information Officer
Laura.Rinehart@loudoun.gov or 571-233-1649
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For Immediate Release:
Recent Rise in Mulch Fires Draws Warning From Fire Officials

Since March 23rd, Loudoun's fire and rescue units have responded to twenty-three fires originating in landscaping mulch. These fires have caused thousands of dollars in damages with the potential of much more devastating results.

One such recent incident occurred the afternoon of April 6th when the Loudoun County 9-1-1 Center received a call for a fire in the 42000 block of John Mosby Highway. The caller reported a fire and that the business was being evacuated. Units from Dulles South, Brambleton, Aldie, and Fairfax County along with the Loudoun County Fire Marshal's Office arrived on scene to find fire showing from the front of the building. The fire, which was quickly extinguished, was deemed by the FMO to have been caused by improperly discarded smoking materials in the mulch next to the structure. Damages



from this incident, which included a nearby vehicle, are estimated at \$10,000. No injuries to public safety personnel were reported however two civilians were evaluated after inhaling chemicals from a fire extinguisher they applied to the fire.

This spring many similar fires have been reported across Virginia resulting in significant damages, prompting statewide concern among fire officials for better data collection, research and awareness campaigns to reduce these types of fires.

Mulch fires occur predominately in spring and summer when vegetation and landscaping materials become dried out, allowing for easy ignition. Fire investigations have repeatedly demonstrated these fires often result from improperly discarded smoking materials. Smokers frequently discard lit smoking materials, including matches, into landscaped areas as they enter or exit a building. In addition, smokers also dispose of smoking materials from elevated balconies onto mulch covered ground material.

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Many mulch fires smolder for hours until igniting surrounding materials such as wood decks or exterior combustible walls. Once this happens, fire quickly spreads up exterior walls into the attic areas, often bypassing smoke alarms and sprinkler systems, causing great risk to occupants.

“Virginia’s fire safety regulations aren’t adequate to reduce the fire potential that mulch presents when placed in proximity to exterior walls or decks,” said Fire Chief W. Keith Brower, Jr. “We recommend that mulch be placed no closer than 18 inches to these structures. We also recommend the use of proper receptacles for the disposal of smoking materials, sturdy metal containers with sand, placed well away from the structure are safest.” said Fire Chief W. Keith Brower, Jr.

These additional safety tips can prevent you from becoming a mulch fire statistic:

- NEVER discard smoking materials into vegetation, potted plants, dried grasses, leaves, or other flammables.
- Recognize hot and dry spells, along with windy conditions allow mulch fires to start more readily.
- IMMEDIATELY report smoke or fire in a mulch bed via 9-1-1.
- Consider using brick or cementitious exterior siding when building or renovating a structure.
- Consider the use of non-combustible materials such as river rock, pea gravel or crushed rock for the first 18 inches around the base of a building with combustible siding and around gas and electrical meters.
- Keep landscaped mulch beds as moist as possible.

For more information on fire prevention, please visit www.loudoun.gov/firemarshal or contact Lisa Braun, Public Education Manager, at 571-258-3222.

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