There are many situations in which we have control of our environment. But with weather, including extreme heat, all we can do is react. The adverse affects of heat can cause serious illness, and also increase the threat of fire.

Periods of drought are a normal part of the Minnesota climate, and the duration of a drought cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. In 2004, 90 Minnesotans lost buildings and belongings because of lightning fires. Sixty-two lightning fires took place in homes and business structures, resulting in damages of $2.7 million.

However, there are special precautions which can be taken to ensure the safety of your family and your property during hot and dry conditions.

July, 2006, was the hottest July in the Twin Cities since 1935 and the third warmest on record.

www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/fire

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www.fire.state.mn.us

Safety concerns during hot and dry conditions

Beating the Heat

WHAT IS HEAT INDEX?

The heat index (HI) is the temperature felt by the human body due to the combined effects of temperature and humidity. Most people understand that as the air temperature goes up, so does the heat index. But why does humidity play a role? It's because perspiration cannot evaporate as well when the humidity is high. Therefore, the cooling effects of sweat are reduced as the humidity rises, and your body is unable to cool itself naturally.

WHAT IS HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS?

Extreme temperatures can cause serious, potentially fatal health problems. However, people can help prevent heat-related illness by keeping cool and drinking plenty of liquids.

Heat-related illness generally results from the body's inability to cool itself. When the body's temperature-control systems of perspiration and circulation are overloaded, or when the body cannot restore fluids and salt lost through sweating, the temperature of the body's inner core begins to rise.

Most at risk are older individuals and people with pre–existing and chronic medical conditions. It is recommended that people visit vulnerable family and friends often during hot weather to be sure they take proper steps to prevent heat exhaustion, heat stroke and other heat–related illnesses.

However, even young, healthy individuals can fall victim. Two major types of heat–related illness exist. Heat exhaustion is non–life–threatening; heat stroke is potentially fatal.

Early warning signs of heat exhaustion include decreased energy, slight loss of appetite, faintness, light–headedness and nausea. People with these symptoms should seek a cool place, drink fluids, remove excess clothing and rest. Heat stress needs attention, but it is not a medical emergency.

Serious signs that indicate a medical emergency and require immediate medical attention include unconsciousness, rapid heartbeat, throbbing headache, dry skin, chest pain, mental confusion, irritability, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramps, staggering and difficulty breathing. In an emergency, dial 911, move the heat–stressed person to a cool area and remove his or her excess clothing, spray the individual with water and fan him or her until help arrives.

FIRE & SAFETY CONCERNS
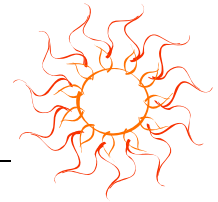
- Avoid driving through dry grass and never park your car there.
- NEVER throw smoking materials out of a vehicle window, lit or unlit.
- Grease trailer wheels, check tires, and be sure safety chains are not touching the ground.
- Internal combustion engines on off-road vehicles require a federally approved spark arrester.
- Check and clean the spark arrester.
- Carry a shovel and a fire extinguisher in your vehicle or OHV/ATV.
- Never play with matches, lighters, flammable liquids, or any fire.
- Teach your friends about fire prevention.
- Know your county's outdoor burning regulations and never burn trash in an unlawful manner.
- Inspect your campsite when you leave to ensure your camp fire is out.
- Never take burning sticks out of a fire.
- Never use any type of fireworks in dry conditions.
- Store flammable liquids in properly vented containers, up and out of reach of children.