

By JOHN JEWELL

Director, Wilson County Emergency Management Agency

Extreme weather conditions in June and early July have produced a record number of brush and grass fires in Wilson County.

During the month of June, Wilson County Emergency Management Agency recorded 71 grass and brush fires. To date in July, 59 brush and grass fire calls have been answered. Four of these calls were volatile and had the potential for significant loss of property and/or life.

The recent string of 130 fires culminated on Friday afternoon, July 6, with a series of three weather related blazes being reported within a 15-minute time slot. The most severe of these incidents was on a farm located on South Commerce Road. When fire units arrived on the scene, the large farm house and two out-buildings were heavily involved. The blaze quickly spread to a mobile home and 30 rolls of hay. With windy conditions, the fire aggressively spread to approximately 15 acres, then jumped South Commerce Road and consumed an additional 15 acres.

Wilson County Emergency Management, State Forestry and the Watertown Volunteer Fire Department were stretched extremely thin as the fire rapidly expanded. At this point, members of the Wilson County Sheriff's Department and the Tennessee Highway Patrol stepped in and filled some badly needed gaps in the attempt to get control of an extremely dangerous situation. Law enforcement officers drove trucks, sprayed water and moved threatened firefighting equipment out of harm's way while maintaining security for the fire scene.

Wilson Emergency Management cannot express enough thanks to the Sheriff's Office and to the Tennessee Highway Patrol law enforcement officers for their assistance. Their professionalism was exemplary and their quick action to assist fire/rescue personnel will not be forgotten.

WEMA would also like to express thanks to Chief Chris Dowell and the Lebanon Fire Department for their assistance with the fire call on Old Rome Pike. The barn fire was started by

lightning and was the first call of the three Friday afternoon blazes that created this complicated series of events. Their assistance allowed WEMA units to be re-positioned to the South Commerce Road fire scene. WEMA was also allowed to return fire and EMS equipment back into service so that future calls could be covered as they continued to come into dispatch.

Wilson County has come through one of the most severe weather-induced fire seasons in recent history. Events of this magnitude emphasize the need for cooperative effort, unification of services, pooling of good resources and to have highly coordinated communications which is essential for effective scene management. With the growth in Wilson County and expansion of its municipalities, the need for working together, to be financially capable of adequately staffing and equipping emergency services is a must if situations of this magnitude are to be managed.

Wilson Emergency Management appreciates the efforts and support of the Sheriff's Office, Tennessee Highway Patrol, Lebanon Fire Department, Watertown Volunteer Fire Department, State Forestry and local citizens who have assisted during the recent fire season incidents. The department sincerely hopes that the rain that continues to fall will curtail the daily barrage of fires. Please do your part to avoid unnecessary burning.