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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND ENVIRONMENT

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www.kdheks.gov

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Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan Approved

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and more than 80 stakeholders met yesterday in a public meeting and approved the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan (SMP) to reduce the air pollution impacts from spring agricultural burning.

“Over several years, during the month of April we have seen exceedances of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone due to agricultural prairie burning in the Kansas Flint Hills,” said John W. Mitchell, Acting KDHE Secretary. “This caused KDHE to coordinate interested and affected parties to draft a Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan (SMP) to reduce the air pollution impacts from spring agricultural burning.”

The Flint Hills region of Kansas is the largest tract of unplowed tallgrass prairie in North America and one of the few large areas of native prairie remaining in the United States. Range management practices used throughout the region dictate that fire be used as a tool to prevent intrusion of trees and woody plants into the stand of prairie grass present, as well as a means to improve the productivity of the rangeland for ranching practices. For the benefits of fire as a rangeland management tool to be realized, burning must be initiated at the proper time. Burning of the tallgrass prairie generally occurs in early to mid April. This has led to an increased interest in the air quality, not only in Kansas, but throughout the United States during the time frame in which the majority of prescribed burning activities occur.

Three public meetings and additional work group meetings have been held this past year and resulted in the Flint Hills SMP.

KDHE would like to thank all of the stakeholders involved in this project which included: livestock producers and ranchers and farmers, local governments, conservation and agribusiness organizations, Kansas State University, fire protection agencies and other interested parties as well as state and federal environmental officials.

Key elements of the Flint Hills SMP include:

- Voluntary measures to reduce emissions from prescribed burning of rangeland in the Flint Hills counties.
- A web site with
 - a predictive, decision-making tool for producers and local fire officials. The tool will assist in predicting smoke plume movement and impacts.
 - fire management practices including
 - techniques for smoke management based on air quality, timing, transport winds, mixing height, dispersion;
 - proper evaluation of humidity, fuel and soil moisture, temperature;
 - practical and current information about ignition and burn techniques.
- A comprehensive fire data collection effort to characterize prairie burning including ambient air monitoring, use of satellite imagery, and a post burn season survey.
- Restrictions on open burning during April, but allowing for agricultural burning related to the management of prairie or grasslands and conservation reserve program (CRP) burning activities in affected counties. Case-by-case exceptions may be granted by local fire officials or KDHE.
- Extensive outreach and education efforts, including booklets, pamphlets, and media exposure.

KDHE encourages ranchers and interested parties to participate in implementing the Flint Hills SMP in several different ways. There will be opportunities to:

- participate in developing a regulation restricting non-prairie burning during April in certain counties,
- attend a prescribed fire training program,
- pass on information to friends, neighbors and local officials,
- provide input and feedback on the web site, tools and fire management practices, and
- supply burn information to your local fire official for the data collection effort.

A Pilot Project will be undertaken during the Spring 2011 in Greenwood and Chase counties in order to try out the predictive computer modeling tool and fire management practices contained in the Flint Hills SMP.

For more information and copy of the plan visit: www.kdheks.gov/bar/air-monitor/flinthills.html.

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As the state's environmental protection and public health agency, KDHE promotes responsible choices to protect the health and environment for all Kansans.

Through education, direct services and the assessment of data and trends, coupled with policy development and enforcement, KDHE will improve health and quality of life. We prevent illness, injuries and foster a safe and sustainable environment for the people of Kansas.

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