

# Godfrey Fire Protection District readying for increased risk of fire hazards

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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GODFREY - This time of year, people are burning leaves, trash and even cursed objects from the year that was - but today is not the day to do that Godfrey Fire Protection District Chief Erik Kambarian said Monday morning.

In fact, the National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a Red Flag Alert as of this morning, Dec. 11, 2017, alerting people to be abundantly cautious with any possible fire they may be starting. That alert means atmospheric conditions are favorable to causing a fire to go out of control. Those conditions include dry weather, plenty of fuel (such as

dead leaves and dry brush), a lack of humidity and strong, gusty winds. Kambarian said those conditions would be in abundance Monday, and possibly for the duration of this week.

"The Village of Godfrey has a burn ordinance in place (managed federally by the Environmental Protection Agency), and village officials are in contact with us about suspending that for Wednesdays and Saturdays, but we are asking people to be very cognizant about that - especially this week. Something as simple as a discarded cigarette can start a fire."

With the amount of wildfires in the news seeming to devour California, Kambarian was asked what sorts of risk Godfrey and its surrounding areas may face with these conditions and possible fires.

"Due to burn ordinances, people being cautious and our topography, we don't have the sorts of fires that burn hundreds of thousands of acres," Kambarian said.

In California, where wildfires are lapping next door to suburbia and developed estates, Kambarian said human development has intruded upon natural cycles, with developments occurring next to undeveloped areas, called the wild land urban interface. That proximity causes the potential of loss of life and property due to "Mother Nature's" cyclical processes. Kambarian said much of the western vegetation and brush burns to fertilize the soil for the next cycle of growth.

"When you place suburban areas in that, you have to realize you face a lot of threats," he said.

While the risk of California-scale wildfires is exceedingly diminished in Godfrey, Alton and the rest of the Riverbend, Kambarian said multi-day fire battles do occur. He said he has responded to one at Pere Marquette State Park several years ago, and another occurred as recently as this year in Northern Calhoun County, near the border with Pike County, Illinois.

Despite the likelihood of such conflagrations being slim, Kambarian said the Godfrey Fire Protection District works in tandem with several other local fire departments through its many mutual aid agreements. Recently, those agreements were put to work during a large brush fire in rural Alton, which threatened to get out of control.

"Our mutual aid system is what we have to help each other in situations like this," Kambarian said. "Alton has a ladder truck, we don't. But, we do have both a brush truck and a tanker."

That brush truck is the Godfrey Fire Protection District's best asset against rural brush fires. Many places under its protection do not have easy access to fire hydrants, so the Godfrey Fire Protection District dispatches one of its brush trucks to respond. The brush truck is a four-wheel-drive off-road machine roughly the same size and shape of a run-of-the-mill pickup truck. The main difference between it and the commercial variety is Godfrey Fire Protection District's brush truck carries about 300 gallons of water.

"It can go off-road and get places a pumper, which is about 30-33 feet long, cannot reach," Kambarian said. "It can go to the heart of the fire, or right on the line, and fight it."

When those 300 gallons of water are spent, the brush truck returns to a nearby pumper truck to refill, instead of travelling upwards of miles to locate a suitable hydrant.

In case that brush truck is not enough, Kambarian said his department will utilize more archaic, but still effective, methods such as shovels and chainsaws to create a firebreak. Firefighters also have water packs with nozzles attached so they can go places where trucks do not dare.

Nearby farmers have also aided in a pinch, Kambarian said. Certain farm implements, especially equipment designed to disc land, can create suitable firebreaks. He said the department does not have such implements, but added local farmers are always willing to do their parts to diminish the negative impact of the fire.

Even with all that equipment, however, Kambarian said it is strongly advised not to burn today and to be cautious with any stray embers - including simple cigarette butts.