

north shore news

Fire risk on North Shore rises from high to extreme

All barbecues banned in West Vancouver; cigarettes still a problem

Chris Slater / North Shore News

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File photo North Shore News

The fire risk on the North Shore has gone from bad to worse after officials bumped the risk rating from high to extreme Wednesday afternoon.

As hot and abnormally dry weather continues throughout the Lower Mainland, officials have been carefully monitoring conditions and ramping up regulations to prevent the possibility of fires.

In the District of West Vancouver the “extreme” warning now in place means a full ban on barbecues in parks is now in effect.

There is also a ban on smoking in public parks as well as a ban on fireworks.

“Aside from pleading with everybody to use extreme caution out in the backcountry, in West Vancouver parks we have banned all open flames, so all propane barbecues, all charcoal barbecues, smoking and fireworks and any open flame whatsoever has been banned . . . ,” said Jeff Bush, assistant fire chief with West Vancouver Fire and Rescue.

Bush said the risk is usually not this high so early in the season and fire prevention staff will be cracking down on offenders.

So far in the month of June alone, Bush said officials in the district have responded to 22 fires that were human caused, particularly in the last two weeks of the month.

“I think we respond to beach fires on a nightly basis. As a fire prevention officer, this has been a month now that this has been going on. I’ll be ticketing people on the spot.”

Over in the District of North Vancouver, which was also moved its fire risk to “extreme” on Wednesday, assistant fire chief Mike Cairns said he doesn’t expect the risk to be lowered anytime soon.

“Today is officially the first day that we’re at extreme. We’ll probably be staying at that here, I would think, (for) the duration of the summer unless we get some significant rain.”

Cairns said one of the biggest factors contributing to fires in the district, which sometimes number as high as 10 reports a day, are people carelessly discarding cigarette butts.

“Our main problem is cigarette butts being tossed carelessly, mainly from car windows but also pedestrians on sidewalks or near green space,” he said.

“Most of the people are co-operating and being very careful but there’s still some people who are being pretty reckless.”

Although the use of barbecues in parks has yet to be banned in the District of North Vancouver, Cairns said that’s likely to happen very soon.

Bush added firefighters want to know if anyone spots a fire.

“If you see smoke coming from a wooded area please call us immediately.”