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NEWS RELEASE

COMMISSIONERS COURT BANS FIREWORKS IN RESPONSE TO HISTORIC DROUGHT CONDITIONS

Judge Emmett Signs Disaster Order Restricting Sale Or Use Of All Fireworks Throughout Unincorporated Harris County

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett signed an order this morning declaring a drought disaster and banning the sale or use of any fireworks anywhere in unincorporated Harris County. Commissioners Court unanimously ratified Emmett's order moments later, extending its provisions and sending it on to Gov. Rick Perry. With Perry's approval, the disaster order remains in effect until rescinded by Emmett.

Because all 34 municipalities in Harris County already have permanent bans on the sale or use of fireworks within their jurisdictions, the action by Harris County means fireworks are illegal to sell or use throughout the entire county. In addition, most neighboring counties and municipalities have banned or are considering banning fireworks. The only exception to the ban is for a public display "conducted by a person holding a valid pyrotechnic operator's license or a valid pyrotechnics special effects operator's license."

"All of us on Commissioners Court recognize public safety as our top responsibility," Emmett said Tuesday. "I think everyone, from Fire Marshal Mike Montgomery and local fire officials to representatives of the fireworks industry and the general public at large, understands the overwhelming need to take serious preventive action to avert disastrous wildfires from threatening our property, our homes and our families."

Harris County is experiencing unprecedented drought conditions this year, with measurements on the Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) approaching 750. The KBDI, which ranges from 0 to 800, is a measure of soil moisture and an indicator of fire potential. Commissioners Court implemented a burn ban until July 19 for unincorporated Harris County earlier this year when the KBDI reached 500. Court members extended that ban for 90 days this morning, keeping the county under a full burn ban until mid-October.

Violators of the fireworks ban face a \$1,000 fine and/or 180 days in jail. Violators of the burn ban face a fine of up to \$500 for each violation.