

**City of Waycross
Ware County
State of Georgia
Georgia Forestry Commission
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Wildfire News

US Highway 1 and 84 Reopened, Evacuations Lifted

(Waycross, Ga.) -- A local, state and federal facility to coordinate the release of official public information concerning the wildfire currently burning in Ware County has been established in Waycross. The following information is current as of 7:30 PM, Wednesday, April 25, 2007.

Road Openings

- Local and state emergency officials reopened US Highway 1 after closing the main artery between Jacksonville, FL and Waycross, GA.
- US Highway 84
- The city limits on the south side of Waycross and Race Pond Road at the Ware-Charlton County line.
- Swamp Road and Suwannee Chapel Road

Road Closures

Georgia Highway 177 toward Swamp Park remains closed.

Evacuation Orders Lifted

Evacuation orders for the following areas have been lifted:

- The entire community of Astoria to US 1 to GA Highway 177
- Laura Walker State Park and Golf Course
- Lions Club Camp for the Blind
- Astoria Loop Rd.
- Lloyd Strickland Rd.
- Ann Strickland Rd.
- Hinson Rd.
- Check Point Rd.
- Braganza Rd.

Re-Entry Information

All residents are allowed to return home, however please remain vigilant of your surroundings and if there is any concern call 911.

Residents of previously evacuated areas east of Gooding Bay Road, west of Eight Mile Post Road and south of U.S. Highway 84 may return to their homes, according to officials of the Georgia Forestry Commission and Ware County Emergency Management Agency.

Fire Update

Fog and smoke will be prevalent around the fire perimeter through Thursday, April 26. Conditions should improve by 9:00 a.m. South and southwest winds will allow smoke to drift north and northeastward. Wind speeds of 15-20 with 25 mph wind gusts tomorrow afternoon. Today, the Georgia Forestry Commission reports 61,109 acres burned. Today, the Georgia Forestry Commission reports 61,109 acres burned. The fire is 50% contained and is located approximately 5 miles west of Waycross.

Though firefighters have made progress on fire breaks, the fire continues to pose a threat to community of Astoria, as well as the northwest portion of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Fires will benefit the swamp wilderness habitat, which is a fire-dependent ecosystem, and will pose only a small threat to the wildlife species that live within it. However, due to the extreme fire conditions we are experiencing, there may be detrimental effects on portions of the swamp. Okefenokee Swamp Park and Dixon Memorial State Forest, south of Waycross, are closed until further notice.

Damage report

Wildfire damage assessments as of April 25, 2007 reports 18 homes destroyed.

Education

Ware County Schools will continue to start one hour later than usual. Bus routes also will run one hour late. School will dismiss at the regular time. Ruskin Elementary students will be transported to Sweat Memorial Baptist Church at 510 Blackshear Avenue. Students will be disseminated at the normal time.

Okefenokee Technical College (OTC), Waycross Campus, will resume normal operation hours on Thursday, April 26, 2007.

Waycross College will resume normal operations on Thursday, April 26, 2007.

Public Health and Safety Issues

Winds from the southeast are expected to continue to bring smoke into the Waycross area for the next few days. Law enforcement officials say don't drive unless it is absolutely necessary if visibility is low. If you must drive, they urge drivers to use their headlights, slow down and use extreme caution in areas affected by smoke and fog.

Smoke from wildfires is a mixture of gases and fine particles from burning trees and other plant materials. Smoke can hurt your eyes, irritate your respiratory system and worsen chronic heart and lung diseases. Anyone can experience effects from smoke exposure, but individuals with chronic heart and lung conditions, children, the elderly and pregnant women are at increased risk. If you are in smoke-impacted areas (which includes areas with visible smoke, smell of smoke, are hazy or with "dust" in the air), public health urges you to:

- Stay inside with windows and doors shut.
- Use the recycle or re-circulate mode on the air conditioner in your home or car.
- If you do not have an air conditioner and if it is too warm to stay inside with the windows closed, seek shelter elsewhere.
- Avoid cooking and vacuuming, which can increase pollutants indoors.
- Avoid physical exertion.
- Asthmatics should follow their asthma management plan.
- Keep at least a five-day supply of medication on hand.

- Breathing through a warm, wet washcloth can also help relieve dryness.
- Post-pone outdoor events.
- Keep airways moist by drinking lots of water.

Contact your doctor if you have symptoms such as chest pain, chest tightness, shortness of breath, or severe fatigue. This is important not only for people with chronic lung or heart disease, but also for individuals who have not been previously diagnosed with such illnesses. Smoke can "unmask" or produce symptoms of such diseases.

Residents returning to homes in fire-impacted areas need to use caution. There may still be "hot spots" smoldering which can lead to someone being burned. Also, older adults, people with small children and anyone with chronic heart and lung diseases should take precautions when cleaning up due to irritants in the air. For more information about health problems related to the smoke, please call your local healthcare provider.

Kids Day, scheduled for Saturday, April 28 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Heritage has been cancelled at the request of the Health Department.

The Red Cross Resource Center remains open at Waycross Middle School on Central Avenue. Red Cross, Public Health, Mental Health and DFCS are there to assist residents who have been displaced from their homes.

Satilla Regional Medical Center (SRMC)

SRMC is preparing to take special precautions to protect patients from smoke entering the hospital. These precautions include shutting down systems that allow outside air to enter, closing some elevators, restricting some entrances, closing corridor doors to compartmentalize potential smoke, and bringing in extra oxygen to have on hand if needed. The public is asked to assist the hospital by adhering to the following advisories.

SRMC Elevator Use Restrictions - until further notice

Elevator use will be restricted due to smoke escaping through elevator shafts and entering the building. Proper signage is being developed to redirect staff/visitor flow. Five of 12 elevators will be restricted until further notice. As always, stairwells are available for traffic flow.

SRMC Entrance Restrictions - until further notice

All staff and visitors will be directed to specific entrances to minimize smoke entering the building. Security and signage will be posted at these entrances to assist with redirecting traffic flow. Visitors are encouraged to use the main entrance and emergency entrance. Please ask staff for assistance with navigating through the hospital efficiently.

Donations for Firefighters

Waycross-Ware Chamber of Commerce reports from the Incident Command Center at the National Guard Armory that fire officials have requested the following items for the first responders:

Foot/Boot Liners, Beef Jerky, Mild Slim Jims, AA Batteries, AAA Batteries, Bandanas, Windex Wipes, Leather Work Gloves, Drink Coolers (Please remember items will not be returned), Insect/Bug Repellent (With Tick Repellent), Sun Screen, Aqua-Cool Neck Wraps, Non-Medicated Saline Nasal Spray, Sun Glasses, Dust Masks, Zip lock Bags (All sizes).

All items should be brought to the National Guard Armory on Garlington Ave in Waycross...Items will NOT be returned. To inquire about supplies and volunteer needs, please

refer to www.brighterdaysministries.net or contact Marty Via with Brighter Days Ministries at (912) 286-5093 or Tammy Brown at (912) 286-2842.

For more information contact the general information line at 912-287-4467 or visit the following Web site:

<http://www.gema.state.ga.us/>

<http://www.inciweb.org/>

<http://www.satilla.org/>

<http://www.ware.k12.ga.us/>