

'Just not worth it': Cox pleads with Utahns to cut back on private fireworks this year

By Carter Williams, KSL.com | Posted - June 15, 2021 at 9:49 p.m.

SALT LAKE CITY — Gov. Spencer Cox made a plea Tuesday evening for Utahns to ditch private firework displays this July as Utah nears its traditional fireworks season.

The governor hosted a [40-minute question-and-answer session on Facebook Live](#), which was inspired by the state's worsening drought conditions and fire risk. Fireworks currently aren't legal in the state and can only be launched in certain areas beginning 11 a.m. on July 2. Cox said Tuesday evening he has spoken with state legislators and leaders of municipalities about cutting back fireworks as that legal launch date quickly approaches.

"Because it's so dry, I'm pleading with you — we're working with the Legislature and local governments — to cut back on fireworks this year," the governor said.

In an update Tuesday evening, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, listed 356 fire starts in Utah from the beginning of January through Monday. That's a few dozen fewer fires than the same point in the calendar last year but well above the 10-year average for mid-June, which is 224 fires.

The data shows that at least 85% of those fires were listed as confirmed human-caused starts, and the fires have scorched over 39,000 acres.

"That just tells you how dry things are right now ... You may not expect it but a single spark can just run. I've seen it happen, it's crazy, it's scary. The vegetation is so dry right now," he said, likening the ability of Utah's vegetation igniting to lighting toilet paper ablaze.

Cox spoke a little more than an hour after [Salt Lake City matched its all-time heat record in the city's 147-year-old weather record book](#), reaching 107 degrees. While that's just a weather event in one part of the state, Tuesday perhaps best exemplified the hot and dry conditions happening across the state leading into astronomical summer. That's why the governor took aim at fireworks, which traditionally are legal to launch in Utah between July 2 and 5 and July 22 and 25 for the Independence Day and Pioneer Day holidays. The state announced a ban on fireworks on all state-managed land and any private unincorporated land in Utah to match bans on federally-managed lands. That means people will likely only be allowed to launch fireworks in municipalities this year — [given that they are within approved zones set up by those towns and cities](#).

It's also why Cox urged people to avoid private fireworks displays altogether even if the state doesn't place a ban on them. Commercial displays, he added, would continue and not be impacted by any bans since they are launched in conjunction with fire officials.

"I would encourage you to not do fireworks this year — just save them for next year, especially aerial fireworks," he said. "It's just not worth it. You don't want to burn your house down, your neighbor's house down or start a large fire that ends burning potentially thousands of acres."

He also said people should take caution when target shooting outdoors. The fire risk from target shooting is the reason [the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources suspended the activity at its wildlife management areas](#) last week. The governor cited drying conditions in low and high-level vegetation for his concerns.

"Everywhere in the state really is like a tinderbox and we need everyone to be extremely careful," he said.

2021 Wildfire Information (as of June 14):

Wildfire by county:

- Uintah: 40 fires
- Washington: 32 fires
- Iron: 32 fires
- Millard: 27 fires
- Duchesne: 24 fires

Leading human-caused wildfire categories this year so far:

- Debris burning
- Equipment
- Campfires

Source: Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands

When it came to the drought and fire danger, Cox reiterated his push for Utahns [to cut back on the water they use for their lawns](#). The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) upped the percentage of land in Utah in an "exceptional" drought to nearly 64% from 62% in its update last week. The U.S. Drought Monitor update also continued to list at least 90% of the state in at least an "extreme" drought and nearly 98% of the state in at least a "severe" drought.

Cox said the drought is either the worst since 1956 or worst on record depending on the metrics used, and lawns can take up plenty of water use. Utah State University Extension experts say between 50% and 65% of annual municipal water use goes toward lawns. The governor pointed out the average quarter-acre lot in Utah uses about 3,000 gallons of water for every watering cycle.

That's what he urged to cut back on again Tuesday evening. He asked residents in northern Utah to water twice a week and residents in southern Utah to water three times a week, with a prioritization toward trees and plants over lawns.

"We need you conserve even more," he said. "We're going to have some yellow lawns this year, maybe even some brown ones. That's OK. Our grass is very resilient, it'll go dormant and come back next year. It's OK if our lawns aren't as beautiful as they have been in years past. It's kind of a badge of honor this year if our grass isn't green."