

Drought conditions cause more Columbia fires in 2012

BY [JARED GRAFMAN](#) Aug 30, 2012 Updated Jun 12, 2015

COLUMBIA—More than twice as many house fires have been reported this summer compared to last. Almost three times as many total fires have been reported so far this August alone compared to last August, according to Columbia Fire Department data.

Battalion Chief Brad Fraizer said the drought is playing a significant role in the increase.

"There's no doubt the dry conditions have caused more fires," he said. "Vegetation is much drier, wood in homes is much drier, so the opportunity for fire is greater."

[Missouri suffered from one of the worst droughts in several decades this summer](#). The Missouri Department of Conservation [issued an open-fire ban in June](#) because of the drought, in hopes of reducing potential fires.

But it's still hot, it's still dry, and houses, business and fields continue to burn in Columbia.

House fires in the summer

The Columbia Fire Department analyzed reports from June 1 through Aug. 1, 2011, and compared it with this year, Fraizer said.

"We noticed that we've had the same amount of residential structure fires that occurred inside the home as last year," he said. "But we've doubled that number of fires that occurred outside the home."

According to the report, between June 1 and August 1:

- 11 fires started inside a homes in both 2011 and 2012.
- 14 additional fires started outside a homes in 2012.

Most were caused by an unwatched grill or a cigarette tossed into a yard.

"That's the majority of what we've seen related to those outdoor fires," Fraizer said.

August fires in Columbia

Almost three times as many fires have been reported so far this August compared to 2011. The spike is because of many more building fires and grass or brush fires than in previous years, according to fire incident reports.

In the period from Aug. 1 to Aug. 28, according to the reports:

- 18 fires were reported in 2009.
- 29 fires were reported in 2010.
- 23 fires were reported in 2011.
- 61 fires were reported in 2012.

The number of reported fires in Columbia is up for the entire year, not just August. Fraizer said 411 fires were reported from Jan. 1 to Aug. 28, 2012. Almost half as many fires — 213 — were reported during the same time last year.

Columbia will continue to be at high risk for fires if rains from Hurricane Isaac miss mid-Missouri entirely and the weather remains hot and dry.