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# CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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**RELEASE**  
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## **PRISON SENTENCE FOR RECKLESS LAWN MOWER**

**Sacramento** – A man who mowed his lawn in 106 degree weather -- despite repeated warnings -- has been sentenced to prison for starting a major wildfire.

Shasta County Superior Court Judge Richard McEachen sentenced William Mathew Rupp, 46, of Jones Valley, to four years in state prison for starting the multimillion dollar Bear Fire of 2004. A jury in February convicted Rupp of two charges: arson, a felony which can carry a penalty of six years in prison, and unlawfully causing a fire by negligent operation of a riding lawn mower, a misdemeanor.

Rupp had been advised on three separate occasions about mowing during the summer months in unsafe conditions but did not heed the warnings. The devastating fire started when the blade on the riding mower Rupp was operating struck a rock and caused sparks to ignite the dry grass.

The Bear Fire started August 11, 2004 at approximately 1:31 p.m. and destroyed 80 residences, 30 outbuildings and 10,848 acres of vegetation on private and federal lands. Total dollar loss to private property and structures was estimated at \$7 million dollars while loss to timber and rangeland was estimated at an additional \$7.5 million. Fire fighting suppression costs from the Bear Fire were \$9.9 million.

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) is seeking reimbursement from Rupp for all suppression costs that were incurred in the Bear Fire.

There is an extremely high potential for fire when using equipment to clear vegetation. The public is urged to avoid any activities that could cause a spark such as mowing, using chainsaws, welding or grinding equipment as well as driving vehicles over dry grass. There is no safe time in which to mow dry grass with a bladed piece of equipment. Mowers should be used only on green grass and string trimmers should be used on all dry vegetation.

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