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NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

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HARD FREEZES, COLD WEATHER HEIGHTEN FIRE RISK

Hard frosts have sent grass, weeds, and trees into dormancy. Dormant vegetation can dry quickly during dry, windy weather, so wildfires are possible within days, or even hours, after a rain - should dry, windy weather occur immediately following a rain. Any wildfires that arise now have more fuel to burn, thus increasing the likelihood of damaging wildfires. Wildfire activity has been picking up across northeast Texas. Wayne Shew, a Texas Forest Service fire dispatcher, urges increased emphasis on outdoor fire safety. Putting in firebreaks around material to be burned, staying with all fires until they are completely out, and burning household trash in burn barrels topped by a metal hardware cloth or screen will prevent many accidental fires. Cooler fall and winter temperatures also increase the likelihood of house fires. Improper use of kitchen ovens or stoves for home heating and unwise placement of space heaters contribute to home fires every year across the state. Have existing home heating systems inspected and have fireplace chimneys inspected and cleaned. Place portable electric heaters away from flammable furnishings or surfaces, and away from locations where the heaters could get bumped and knocked over. In particular, closely supervise young children when space heaters are in use.

Purchase and install smoke detectors if you don't already have them, and make certain that existing smoke detectors are working. Carbon monoxide detectors are valuable additions to home safety equipment.

Farmer's Tax Guides Available

We have received a supply of the Farmer's Tax Guides for use in preparing 2003 income tax returns. This publication explains how the federal tax laws apply to farming. The Farmer's Tax Guide should be used as a guide to figure taxes and complete the farm tax return. Stop by the Gregg County Extension Office at 405 East Marshall to get your free copy. This and other IRS publications are available from the IRS web site at www.irs.gov.

Horse Program

Plans are being completed for an excellent horse program to be held on Saturday, January 17, 2004 beginning at 9:00 a.m. The program will be held at Turnbow's Stables in Longview. Some of the subjects discussed at this seminar include equine health, nutrition, and training tips. This is a program that horse owners will not want to miss.

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Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.

