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House Republicans Present Responsible Spending Plan to Avert State Shutdown

Governor will sign proposal if passed as presented

With the end of the First Regular Session fast approaching, Maine lawmakers are hard at work in an effort to craft a new biennial budget. Accordingly, House Republicans have laid out their core commonsense priorities for inclusion in the financial blue print. Among them are:

- increased funding for public education, with additional dollars directed toward classroom instruction;
- encouraging and sustaining economic growth via a fair and balanced income tax structure;
- reducing the size of State Government by eliminating unfilled positions;
- ensuring General Assistance dollars are available to legal Maine residents only;
- property tax relief by providing a reduction of up to \$20,000 (\$15,000 for 2016 and \$10,000 for years prior to 2016) in the value of your home; and
- better access to care for the severely mentally, physically, and developmentally disabled who have been ensnared on waitlists.

For a more in-depth understanding of these policies of precedence, please click [here](#).

Maine Forest Service Concerned about Holiday Fire Safety

Towns and residents cautioned about danger and liability associated with burn permits issued by privately owned entities

The [Maine Forest Service](#) is cautioning towns and residents against using third-party, non-sanctioned online burn permit systems after at least two fires occurred this spring. The fires likely would not have resulted if the officially sanctioned State online burn permit system

had been used instead of that of a third party.

On June 8, about eighty letters were mailed out to town managers and fire chiefs that use privately based online burn permit systems. It requested that each community “immediately discontinue its use of these (privately owned electronic burn permit) systems.” Most have already complied and are utilizing the official State system (www.maineburnpermit.com) that has been in place since 2005, issuing over 88,000 online burn permits.

Initially, most towns adhered to the letter and stopped using the privately owned online burn permit systems. Recently, some of the subscribers to the privately owned online burn permit systems have allowed burn permits to be issued. With the 4th of July holiday weekend approaching, the [Maine Forest Service](#) is concerned about escaped brush pile fires and the use of illegal burn permits. In the past, there have been a lot of wildfires during the 4th of July weekend.

State fire safety officials have learned that at least one system has continued to issue permits despite the notification that their system is not legal under current Maine law.

The [Maine Forest Service](#) issued the letter based on a recent review of the legality of the privately owned online burn permit systems by the Office of the Maine Attorney General. In short, the law only allows State-owned online burn permit systems to be used. Maine towns and residents are warned not to use the illegal third-party systems because:

- there is a question about liability should a permit issued by a privately owned system result in an escaped wildfire that destroys property or causes injury and or death;
- a burn permit is a legal document required to be administered by the [Maine Forest Service](#), who authorizes town fire wardens to issue permits based on local conditions; and
- if the State system is not used, it is possible that the person with no background or training in fire safety may approve the permit.

The Danger of Private Systems

Several brush pile burns issued through privately-owned systems have escaped. The most [recent fire occurred in the Town of China on April 15, 2017](#), when an escaped fire burned a barn and an apartment. The fire also knocked down power lines in the area.

Another fire occurred when a person, using a privately-owned online burn permit system, had the fire escape and burn one acre in Litchfield on April 14, 2016. That fire threatened two structures and resulted in a summons for the landowner. In both cases, the wildfires

occurred because the permits through the privately-owned online systems were issued during the day, which is when most escaped fires occur.

In 2012, careless issuing of permits through a private online system resulted in a wildfire in a town in central Maine. According to the Ranger, the Fire Chief “forgot to turn off the permit system” and allowed it to issue electronic burn permits on a class 3 (high fire danger) day in the fall. One of the fires escaped and the local fire dept. was called in to contain it. This would not have happened with the State system, because it automatically shuts down on a class three or higher day.

The [Maine Forest Service](#) online burn permit system does not allow burning until after 5 p.m., when the winds die down and the temperature drops. If these citizens used the State system, it is likely that the escaped fires would not have occurred. There are only two ways to obtain a valid permit in Maine. One is a paper permit provided to towns by the Maine Forest Service at no cost. The other is through an online system developed by the Director of the [Maine Forest Service](#). Municipalities can adopt additional permits through ordinance, but the [Maine Forest Service](#) permit is still required. No other permit is authorized by statute and individuals burning without one of the two [Maine Forest Service](#) permits are in violation of Maine law and may be responsible to pay suppression costs should their fire escape.

It is proven to be a safe and convenient system and has greatly improved our fire prevention efforts. The system only allows burning on class 1 or 2 days after 5 p.m., when the risk of an escaped fire is lower. It should be noted that escaped brush piles are the leading cause of wildfires in Maine.

The Maine online burn permit system allows forest rangers and town fire wardens to monitor all permits issued via e-mail or text messaging. In the event that fire conditions change, they also have the ability to shut the system down temporarily, block unauthorized users, and increase the restrictions listed on the permit.

Although the permits cost \$7.00 each, the permit is valid over a 48 hour period and \$2.00 from every permit goes back to the town. The intension of the revenue sharing is to benefit

the fire departments, but it is up to the town how the money is used.

Nominations Open for 2017 Governor's Award for Business Excellence

Annual award recognizes for-profit companies demonstrating high levels of attentiveness and dedication to service

The [Maine Department of Economic and Community Development \(DECD\)](#) is now accepting nominations for the 2017 Governor's Award for Business Excellence.

This award is presented annually to for-profit companies that consistently demonstrate high levels of achievement in manufacturing and service excellence, as well as a steadfast commitment to employees, customers, and the community.

Companies that have been in business in Maine for five or more years may be nominated or may nominate themselves. The DECD strongly encourages businesses of all sizes to apply. Completed nomination forms, available on the [DECD's Web site](#) are due to the Department by Friday, August 25. Winners will be notified prior to an award ceremony to be scheduled in the fall of 2017.

The Governor's Award for Business Excellence, sponsored by FairPoint, was created in 1991, and 141 companies to date have received the award. The DECD is proud to administer the excellence awards and to work with the Governor's office and review team to evaluate and score the applications.

For more information on the award, please click [here](#) or email Torrey Gray, torrey.j.gray@maine.gov.

Maine BMV Unveils New Video to Help Prepare Road Test Applicants

Road test applicants now have a chance to view the entire process before their test date, in a new video offered on the [Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles \(BMV\) Web site](#).

[“What to Expect During the State of Maine Class C License Road Test”](#) features driver license examiners from throughout the State, guiding an applicant through the process. Viewers will get a first-hand look at all aspects of the road test process, from the vision screening to the parallel parking maneuver, and have a better sense of what to expect during their own test.

The live-action video is available to view on the [BMV Web site Exams Page](#) and on the [Maine Department of the Secretary of State YouTube page](#).

The video was created in-house, filmed at the Augusta Bureau of Motor Vehicles branch during the spring of 2017. It is one of several resources for aspiring drivers in Maine, along with the road test study guide and the guides found [here](#) for both parents and teens on its [Teen Driver Resources page](#).

House Republican Office Links

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