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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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New Online Burn Permit System in Missoula County

Missoula, MT. As snow continues to accumulate in the surrounding mountains, fire managers with the Missoula County Fire Protection Association are already looking at the opening of burning season and one big change on the way for residents of Missoula County who want to burn leaves, brush, fields, or slash piles. Starting March 1, 2012, Missoula County will begin using an online burn permit system.

Missoula County, which issues between 5,000 and 8,000 burn permits in a year, will join several other counties in Montana with this more efficient way to issue and monitor burn permits. Getting a permit typically requires traveling to a fire department and may even include waiting in line. Some departments are inundated with nothing more than writing permits. Having the system available online will streamline this process considerably. Anyone can get their permit at any time, even on the day they want to burn. People without their own computer can still go into a fire station or the health department in order to get their permit. The system will also streamline information sharing between fire departments and dispatch centers.

People will need to “activate” their permit on the day they intend to burn. Activation is done either online or via the phone and must happen the morning of the burn. The process is similar to calling the burn hotline as previously required. The activation process will allow dispatchers and firefighters to have real time information on who is burning and where.

The system does come with a cost. Each permit will be five dollars. The cost goes to pay for the set-up of the system and the administrative fee for each permit. For people who will have several burn piles in multiple locations, only one \$5 permit is required but the person must indicate where all the piles are located. If permit holders need multiple types of permits (for example, “general” and “essential agriculture”), they will need to get two different permits at \$5 each.

There are three categories of burn permits available in Missoula County: General, Essential Agriculture, and Prescribed Wildland. Descriptions are below:

- General – This permit expires August 31st of each year. General cleanup of untreated vegetative waste that does not include trade waste. All materials must be generated onsite. NOTE: In the Air Stagnation Zone, piles of grass or deciduous leaves may not be disposed of through outdoor burning.
- Essential Agriculture – This permit expires on October 31st of each year. Outdoor burning conducted on a farm or ranch to eliminate excess vegetative matter from an irrigation ditch or cultivated fields, or to improve range conditions or wildlife habitat. Agricultural burning should only be conducted when no reasonable alternative methods of disposal are available.
- Prescribed Wildland – This permit expires November 30th of each year. Planned outdoor burning that is conducted on forest land or relatively undeveloped range land to improve wildlife habitat or range conditions, promote forest regeneration, reduce fire hazards resulting from forestry practices, control forest pests and diseases, or promote any other accepted silvicultural practices.

The Missoula County Fire Protection Association understands there will be several questions early in this program. People with questions or comments are encouraged to contact Sarah Coefield, Missoula City-County Health Department, at 406-258-3642, or MCFPA spokeswoman Cindy Super at 406-542-4321. Or, visit www.mcfpa.org for a link to the system (coming in mid-February) and a list of Frequently Asked Questions.

The Missoula County Burn Permit Service is the result of an alliance between state and county government and the private sector. It was cooperatively developed and is supported by Missoula County, the Missoula County Fire Protection Association, the Montana Department of Administration's State Information Technology Services Division, and Montana Interactive, LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of eGovernment provider NIC (Nasdaq: EGOV).

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