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Prepared by: Ellis County Communications
101 W. Main Street
Waxahachie, TX 75165

Contact: Diana Buckley, 972-825-5087, Diana.Buckley@co.ellis.tx.us

Caution urged in use of fireworks

With soaking rains a strong possibility for the week, Ellis County Commissioners took no action on a proposed burn ban during Monday night's meeting, opting instead to urge citizens to exercise caution in the use of fireworks during the upcoming holiday weekend.

"I am hoping that we are going to get enough rain this week to lower the (Keetch-Byram Drought Index) sufficiently and mitigate some grass fires," said Fire Marshal's Investigator Jim Pharr. "Hopefully, the public will be careful."

According to Pharr, the KBDI stood at 521 on Monday, with forecasts calling for significant rain. Historically, the Court has enacted a ban when the index rises above 500, but the hope of immediate relief along with the difficulty of notifying the public in time for the July 4 holiday and a concern about economic impacts stayed the action.

The National Fire Protection Association and the Consumer Product Safety Commission estimate that:

- 30,100 fires are caused by fireworks each year
- 7,000 injuries were caused by fireworks in 2008
- Seven deaths were related to fireworks in 2008
- \$34 million direct property loss from fireworks was sustained in 2008
- 62 percent of injured persons were male
- Two of every five people injured were under the age of 15

For additional recommendations on fireworks safety, including a short safety video, visit www.fireworkssafety.org.

Commissioners voted to authorize an agreement with the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts for an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant in the amount of \$138,184 funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"We've been involved with our energy management for several years, to look at our energy usage and see how we could reduce it," said County Engineer Joe White, adding that the recent move into the new facility in downtown Waxahachie is expected to have a positive impact on the

County's energy consumption. "This grant is set up so you can find your main use of electricity that could be more efficient."

White said the older portion of the detention center, phases one and two, are highly inefficient in terms of energy usage.

"This grant would allow us to have a large engineering and energy management firm to come in and do an assessment, and if funds are left over, we could apply those toward some of the small fixes," he added. "We have an RFQ out and are in the process of looking at those."

The Court also approved a letter to be sent to responsible local inspection stations recognizing their compliance with state emissions inspection laws.

"We support these stations that are doing the right thing and voluntarily complying with what the state requires regarding inspection of vehicles and emissions," said Brad Elliott, Deputy Constable Pct. 2. "Since the beginning, we have gone from where we had anywhere from 150 to 175 fraudulent inspections that actually occurred at the inspection station, to where we now have 25."

Elliott said there are 37 inspection stations county wide, with 29 of those expected to receive the letter of appreciation.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Appointed Dub Nowell to the board of the Red Oak Emergency Services District #4 for a term to run through December, 2011;
- Approved a three year contract with Westlaw online subscription service to include an additional Westpack discount of 50 percent on Texas Cases and Texas Jurisprudence print titles, saving \$13,676 in Law Library funds annually;
- Approved closure of a dedicated alleyway located in Skyline Acres Subdivision in precinct 4;
- Took no action on the proposed purchase of cold laid asphalt from APEX Company;
- Adjourned into executive session to consult with counsel regarding possible sale or lease of real property, regarding Cause No. 80843, Ellis County et al v Michael McConnell et al, and regarding Cause No. 79293, City of Milford v Nestor Calderon, Jr. et al, with no resulting action taken.