

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
NEWS RELEASE

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**U.S. FOREST SERVICE IMPLEMENTS CLOSURE ORDER TO PROHIBIT USE OF
EXPLODING TARGETS ON NATIONAL FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS IN ROCKY
MOUNTAIN REGION**

Exploding targets have started at least 16 wildfires since 2012 on Forest Service lands in 8 western states, with 7 of those fires occurring in the Rocky Mountain Region causing the federal government to spend approximately \$33.6 million in suppression costs

DENVER – The U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region, working closely with the U.S. Attorney’s Office, today announced that the Regional Forester has signed a regional closure order prohibiting un-permitted explosives on national forest system lands, specifically to prohibit the use of exploding targets.

The closure order was announced by U.S. Attorney John Walsh, Rocky Mountain Regional Forester Dan Jiron, and U.S. Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region Special Agent in Charge Laura Mark during a press conference about the wildfire danger caused by exploding targets.

“Enjoying your public lands is what we encourage and promote every day,” said Regional Forester Jiron. “Hunting and target shooting are welcome recreational experiences on national forest system lands. We just want visitors to have safe and enjoyable experiences.”

Exploding targets have been identified as the cause of at least 16 wildfires in the western states, costing taxpayers over \$33,000,000 in fire suppression costs. The order applies to all un-permitted explosives, but focuses on exploding targets. The closure order includes all national forests and grasslands in the five-state Rocky Mountain Region. Those states include: Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

Exploding targets can be purchased legally and are intended for use as a target for firearms practice. Exploding targets generally consist of two or more separate chemical components that become an explosive when mixed together. The powder components are kept separate within individual containers for sale and transport. Once mixed, however, the components become explosive, and thus are subject to federal explosive laws and regulations.

The targets explode when struck by a bullet. When detonated, exploding targets often result in a fireball that can ignite vegetation and surrounding materials. The explosion also causes other risks to an individual’s health and safety.

Under the Order, if caught using an exploding target, the user can face a fine of up to \$5,000 and imprisonment of not more than 6 months.

“The top priority is for people to be safe. The public should know that exploding targets pose serious dangers, not just in their actual explosion, but in the wildfires they can start,” said U.S. Attorney John Walsh. “By barring the use of exploding targets, today’s action will prevent

wildfires and protect the public, including first responders who often come across the explosive. It's important to note that the Forest Service's new order does not affect or change the rules regarding target shooting or other safe uses of firearms in the national forest, but only prohibits the use of exploding targets that start wildfires."

"Exploding targets pose a very real safety threat to visitors and our employees" said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "In the past year alone, at least 16 wildfires on national forests have been associated with exploding targets, causing millions of dollars in suppression costs while threatening the safety and well-being of surrounding communities."

"We have seen a significant increase in the use of exploding targets on National Forest lands within the Region" said U.S. Forest Service Regional Special Agent in Charge Laura Mark. "Our objective is to educate the public on the dangers associated with the use of these targets in vegetation that can ignite a fire, as well as the safety risk they pose to the public, our employees and first responders. In addition to the seven fires caused by exploding targets on national forests in the Region since 2012, explosives ordinance demolition experts have had to respond on three occasions this year to safely dispose of unused targets that had been mixed but not yet used."

"The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is working on a Fire Prevention Order that will ban exploding targets on BLM lands in Colorado as well," said John Bierk, State Staff Ranger for BLM Colorado/Eastern States.

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