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NEWS RELEASE

JUDGE EMMETT DECLARES COUNTY DISASTER, BANS THE SALE AND USE OF AERIAL FIREWORKS

*High Temperatures, Drought Conditions
Lead To Extreme Danger of Pyrotechnics-Related Fires*

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett issued a county disaster declaration this afternoon, banning the sale and use of all stick rockets and missiles with fins within Harris County.

With Harris County experiencing unseasonably warm temperatures and dry conditions for several weeks, Emmett said, the risk of wildfires and damage to residential and commercial property is unacceptably high and warrants the countywide ban on the specified fireworks. The judge noted that many fireworks merchants already have agreed to a voluntary ban on the sale of the items, a move Emmett praised as responsible and civic-minded.

"Public safety is my top priority in this matter, and this declaration is absolutely necessary to ensure that Harris County residents remain as safe as possible in these weather conditions," said Emmett. "While I applaud the voluntary sales ban to which many merchants have already agreed, this declaration extends that ban not just to sales, but also to *the use and transportation* of these particular fireworks by anyone other than a licensed pyrotechnics expert at a permitted event."

Emmett's disaster declaration takes effect at midnight tonight. Under state law, the ban remains in effect for 60 hours – until noon Friday – unless extended by Gov. Rick Perry. Emmett has notified the governor's office of the disaster declaration by telephone and letter this afternoon.

"I strongly encourage residents of Harris County to enjoy the activities leading up to the Independence Day holiday, but to do it in such a way that protects themselves, their families and their neighbors," said Emmett.

Laws and ordinances vary within Harris County, with some jurisdictions and municipalities outlawing the use of all fireworks. Residents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with all related regulations before using fireworks of any kind.