

Fire Prevention Efforts Show Results in Choctaw & Chickasaw Nations of OK

Each year, the Choctaw Nation hosts a festival during Labor Day weekend. The festival boasts big name entertainers, a midway with food vendors and free carnival rides, RV and tent camping, a variety of sporting events and competitions, and many family reunions. It is attended by as many as 30,000 tribal members and is open to the surrounding community as well. Located at historic Tuskahoma, many festival attendees camp out from three to five days. Each year they also cook out on all manner of charcoal, propane and wood-fired cookers.

Due to the time of year, this festival is frequently accompanied by high fire danger, and in 2005 the danger was critical. The festival atmosphere, 10,000 or more campers, heavy traffic congestion, 100° heat, and light grassy fuels all combined with drought-induced extreme fire danger created the potential for disaster should a wildfire begin.



Fire Danger at Tuskahoma

As the 10,000 plus campers packed into the 800 acre site, they were greeted by signs showing extreme fire danger and notices that the Chief had declared a burning ban to be in effect during the event. This ban was rigidly enforced on campers and vendors alike. Vendors were required to have their cooking operations inspected and approved by tribal officials, and fire extinguishers were mandatory for approval. Campers were limited to cooking on gas stoves or grills. Strong tribal and event staff support, frequent patrols and an aggressive public contact campaign resulted in few conflicts over the burn ban. Smokey Bear was also on hand to promote fire safety to the smaller children. These efforts resulted in no wildfire starts during this year’s festival; this success was credited to the high profile prevention campaign waged by the tribe’s Forestry Division.

The Chickasaw Nation’s festival was a month later at Tishomingo, Oklahoma. This festival has a slightly different focus. Area schools are invited to bring their students for a day of outdoor education covering a variety of subjects from cultural heritage and environmental responsibility, to fire management and prevention.



Chickasaw Nation Festival

The Chickasaw Agency provides the fire management and prevention program. The program is filled with wildfire prevention messages using Smokey Bear and providing age appropriate prevention materials. This year the efforts reached students and adults throughout Chickasaw Nation during the week-long event. Even though fuel prices were at record levels, schools bused their students from over 45 miles away.

Both the Choctaw Nation and the Chickasaw Agency have recently initiated Wildland Fire Prevention Programs.