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New county Web site lists all prescribed burns

Thanks to a new county Web site, the next time residents smell smoke in Sarasota, they'll be able to tell at the touch of a button whether it's from a wild brushfire or from a controlled burn permitted by Sarasota County. The site, available at www.scgov.net is updated daily and uses fiery orange icons against a local map to denote each burn. Rolling a mouse over the icon brings up the exact location of the burn.

"We've been working to bring this to citizens and the media for a long time," said John Hickey, who manages the county's air quality program. "We've had a notification system in place for years, but we wanted to give people who may not have access to those alerts a place where they could see immediately see where a burn is taking place. It gives residents a level of comfort."

The site is also handy for local journalists. Last year a traffic reporter in a helicopter warned morning commuters about a brushfire on the interstate near Venice. It was actually a controlled burn that was safe and contained.

"Residents often call news outlets and the county's own Call Center to report fires, and we're grateful for that," said Hickey. "This Web site will allow everyone to see instantly whether the fire has been authorized by the Department of Forestry. Hickey adds that wildfires will not be depicted on the map."

Sarasota County's prescribed burn program is designed to restore native plant habitat and reduce the possibility of natural vegetation fueling a wildfire that could threaten nearby property.

To learn more about Sarasota County's prescribed burn program, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Natural Resources. To access the burn Web site, visit www.scgov.net, click on County A-Z and then "Burn Map."