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JUNE 26TH 2012 BY UNKNOWN

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*By Annabeth Miller,
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Area firefighters from Dexter and four other Stoddard County communities have been battling a 10-mile string of fires Tuesday afternoon.

Dexter firefighters – along with crews from Bloomfield, Essex, Dudley and Bernie – have worked the string of wildfires fueled by the high temperatures and extreme dry conditions in the area.

Because of the smoke and poor visibility, both lanes of Highway 25 south from Dexter to Bernie have been closed for a time Tuesday afternoon, and one lane of Highway 60 has also been closed to traffic.

According to Dexter City Administrator Mark Stidham, the fires appear to have started from sparks from Union Pacific crews that have been “grinding” the tracks south of Dexter. Due to the dry, tender-like conditions of grass and undergrowth, the fires spread quickly, eventually stretching just south of Highway 60, almost to Bernie.

Stidham reported a volunteer fireman from Bloomfield sustained second and third degree burns while fight the blaze, and was transported to Missouri Southern Healthcare in Dexter for treatment.

“The dry conditions combined with high temperatures, low humidity and this afternoon’s wind have made these hard to control,” Stidham said.

One home near Highway 60 sustained damage, Stidham said, when flames damaged the siding on the back of the house. In addition, at least three different sheds in the fires’ pathways were destroyed by the blaze.

Stage agencies such as the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Division of Fire Safety, are urging Missourians to use extra caution in the extreme drought conditions in the state. Several counties have issued “no burn” orders, and communities throughout the state have banned or are considering a ban of fireworks for next week’s Independence Day holiday.

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