

June 1, 2023

Huerfano County Commissioners
401 Main Street
Walsenburg, Co 81089

RE: Failure of Huerfano County Burn Permitting Process

On or about May 18th, I stopped at the County Courthouse to complete a Burn Permit to reduce flammable fuel left over from removing a lightning-struck tree. This seemed to be a simple process, facilitated by Ryan Sablich, who took the completed Permit, which was subsequently approved. During my conversation with Ryan, I mentioned that I would need to extend the time frame, because of the amount of material to be burned, and the fact that I shut down my burns around 1:00 in the afternoon when the winds come up. He did not have a problem with it being extended.

Rain and high winds prevented me from burning throughout the approved time frame, so I called on May 25th and spoke with Sky Tallman about extending the permit. He said I would have to come down and fill out another permit, or when I explained the time and distance involved in doing that, I could just send him an email request to extend the existing permit which I did.

When I did not receive approval, I called again, and this time was told that it would have to be approved by the local fire department and the health department before I could call dispatch for permission to burn.

Between then and now, I have left at least five or six messages on Ryan's phone since I have not received either email approval or a phone call, saying it was approved. A week later, I have never received a return call or an email back. Meanwhile, we have had perfect weather for burning, which I could not take advantage of.

Today I called the County Administrator, and expressed my opinion that this was a complete bureaucratic failure on Huerfano County's part. I have been diligent in trying to negotiate the burn rules, and have gotten virtually nowhere. She said she would try to get to the bottom of this.

Sky Tallman called after I talked with the County Administrator, and explained that I had to start completely over, despite the fact that he had a fully completed and approved permit in his file, plus the email which he had requested from me earlier asking for an extension. Unbelievable! One would think that he would have some discretion in providing approval with the information at hand, but he claimed he is only following the rules. (as if I'm not!)

I completed the new permit this morning and emailed it to him, and he just called and said he had received only a blank form back. So I had to start over again! And it wouldn't be approved until the local fire department had given a second approval. I have re-completed and re-sent the application.

I should mention here that my property has been inspected by the local fire department several times since Joseph's death by members of the fire department, and no one has expressed any qualms at all

about the burn set-up we have here: running water, tools, a dedicated burn area, etc, and we have never had a problem in the 13 years I have lived here. **How many times does this have to be inspected?**

I have made an honest effort to comply with what I consider to be an extremely bureaucratic and time consuming permitting process. The previous rules we had for burning were simple, and one could get a direct answer by calling dispatch, relative to burn conditions and site recommendations. It worked for many years. Joseph expressed the same sentiment to Carl Armstrong before he died. I think this new permitting process is a disaster and a real burden on county residents who are seeking to reduce flammable fuel to prevent wildfires.

Additionally, I have been told by Carl, that burn barrels are excluded from the permitting process, and by DC, our acting fire chief, that they are not allowed at all. Some clarification is in order. It would be nice if the County Commissioners were sent a written summary of an expedited permitting process to residents so that we could all proceed under the official rules.

I sincerely hope that the County can come up with a less onerous system, and one that is more responsible and timely for its residents.

Please advise me of any changes you make.

Thank you.

Mary Jensen
25863 State Highway 69
Gardner, CO 81040

Cc: Bruce Newman