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Ward 9, director of Hudson Valley Air Quality Coalition:

As we enter another fall season here, a DEC- acknowledged likely time for wildfire activity, Kingston remains unprotected , with no temporary burn ban on all outdoor burning in place. This is despite these facts:

FACT:

- the unprecedented wildfires in UC in 2024,

FACT:

-despite the DEC data demonstrating that fire risk has dramatically increased here since 2022 [please see graph],  
and

FACT:

despite the fact that most surrounding UC jurisdictions put these into place during the 2024 wildfire period because there was elevated fire risk, yet Kingston leadership proved itself unwilling to do so then.

FACT:

DEC has found that most wildfires in NYS are human-caused: they estimate between 66-95%.

FACT:

between 2010-2024, UC has seen 244 incidents of fires greater than 10 Acres and 26 incidents of fires greater than 100 acres..

FACT:

Kingston faces special risks:

-densely sited homes

-woodframe houses

-located in a valley, where smoke and pollutants get trapped.

-located where the DEC estimates that high fire danger is increasing dramatically in the last few years.

FACT:

Since HVAQ first raised this concern and began advocating for this proposed temporary burn ban, community after community in the US either threatened by or destroyed by fires that are now characterized as “wildland urban fires” (WUI): settled towns whose homes and structures are at risk due to the same worsening climate factors and parameters that the DEC uses to calculate its fire risk data here in Kingston and inform its daily fire danger map. These communities have learned through tragic and catastrophic experience that climate change is real, and that ways of thinking and doing things that served us 10 or even 5 years ago are dangerously inadequate.

FACT:

The latest research into WUI fires shows that urban FDs are equipped to fight discrete, individual fire events, not large, rapidly-spreading fires that are fueled by actual structures and homes.

The argument that the KFD does not have the resources to enforce a temporary burn ban defies logic, as a resulting WUI fire would likely prove impossible for the KFD, as an urban FD, to extinguish. Smaller surrounding UC communities, with arguably fewer resources, enforced their own bans in 2024. And the argument that the FD could get to any fire within 3 minutes relies on decades-old paradigms that do not take into account these new climate realities. A wildfire spreading through Kingston, consuming homes as it goes, with wind-driven embers, would spread rapidly and be overwhelming to our FD, as these other fires proved to be for the FD in Altadena, CA.