

Search warrant details forest fire investigation

By Joe Beck

Search warrant documents filed Friday in Shenandoah County Circuit Court show authorities have targeted an Edinburg man in their investigation into several forest fires on July 24.

Shenandoah County Fire Marshal David Ferguson would not comment on the investigation and a phone call to the U.S. Forest Service was not returned. But the documents state that Ferguson sought the search warrants "in relation to an offense substantially described as ... setting fire to woods."

The accompanying affidavits state the search warrants were executed on two vehicles owned by Tommy Smith, 15718 Senedo Road. A search was also conducted at Smith's residence.

The affidavits signed by Ferguson state that authorities identified

eight fires along Forest Service Road 92 on July 24.

Some of the evidence collected from Smith's vehicles was consistent with evidence found at several fire scenes, the affidavits state.

The items seized from a 2005 Dodge van owned by Smith include combustible material and what the affidavits described as a cigarette pack "stuffed full with paper towels on the rear passenger floor board."

Ferguson's affidavit states that a Shenandoah County sheriff's deputy stopped Smith's van at 8:24 p.m. July 24 on Forest Service Road 92 "based on an eyewitness

report matching the description" of a vehicle seen "leaving the area where a number of fires were burning along Forest Road 92."

The affidavit states that Smith, after denying seeing any fires, "stated that he may have flipped a cigarette out of the window."

The affidavit also states that a Forest Service law enforcement officer reported that "weather conditions present at the time were inconsistent with parameters established through research for fires started by discarded cigarettes."

Contact staff writer Joe Beck at 540-465-5137 ext. 142, or jbeck@nvdaily.com.

