Safety Tips for Open Burning Season

Open Burning Season Starts January 15 and Ends May 1

Open burning season is from January 15 to May 1 each year in communities where it is allowed. Check with your local fire warden or fire chief.

Permit Required from Local Fire Warden/Fire Chief

A permit must be obtained from the local fire warden, usually the local fire chief.

Weather conditions can change rapidly, especially in the spring, and fire wardens will determine on a daily basis when it is safe to conduct open burning. If winds kick up or other atmospheric conditions change suddenly, making it unsafe to burn, permits can be rescinded.

The open burning must be a minimum of 75 feet from all buildings and must be conducted between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and must take place on the land closest to the source of material to be burned, according to Department of Environmental Protection regulations (310 CMR DEP 7.07).

Burning, with a permit for the following materials is allowed:

- Brush, cane, driftwood, and forestry debris from other than commercial or industrial land clearing operations.
- Materials normally associated with the pursuit of agriculture such as fruit tree prunings, dead raspberry stalks, blueberry patches for pruning purposes, and infected bee hives for disease control.
- Trees and brush resulting from agricultural land clearing.
- Fungus infected elm wood, if no other acceptable means of disposal is available.

Burning of the following materials is prohibited statewide:

- Brush, trees, cane and driftwood from commercial and/or industrial land clearing operations.
- Grass, hay, leaves and stumps, and tires.
- Construction material and debris.

How to Safely Ignite the Fire

An adult should always be present during open burning and children and pets should be kept a safe distance away.

Use paper and kindling to start the fire and add progressively larger pieces of wood. Parts of a leftover Christmas tree may also be used.

FireFACTORS

Office of the State Fire Marshal
Department of Fire Services
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Open Burning Safety Tips

Never use gasoline, kerosene or any other flammable liquid to start a fire because the risk of personal injury is high.

Burn one small pile at a time and slowly add to it. This will help keep the fire from getting out of control.

Select a location away from any utility lines.

Fire Must Be Attended Until Extinguished

While the fire is burning, an adult must attend the fire until it is completely extinguished.

Have Fire Control Tools On Hand

Have fire extinguishment materials on hand including a water supply, shovels and rakes.

The water supply could be a pressurized water fire extinguisher, a pump can or garden hose, and be sure to test it out before igniting the fire. You do not want to find out that the water is still shut-off at the house faucet or that the hose is cracked when you need it most.

Watch the Wind: Be Prepared to Extinguish All Open Burning

Be prepared to extinguish your fire if the winds pick up or weather changes. Use common sense and don't wait for the fire department to contact you that it has become unsafe to burn. Sudden wind change is how most open burning gets out of control.

Don't Delay a Call For Help

If for some reason, the fire should get out of control, call the fire department immediately.

Use the utmost caution to prevent injury to yourself or family members or any damage by fire to your home.

People conducting illegal burning, or who allow a fire to get out of control, may be held liable for costs of extinguishing the fire, fined and even imprisoned (MGL C48 S13).

April is the Cruelest Month

April is usually the worst month for brush fires. When the snow pack recedes, before new growth emerges, last year's dead grass, leaves and wood are dangerous tinder. Winds also tend to be stronger and more unpredictable during April.

Prevent Wildfires By Burning During Wet Snowy Conditions

Prevent permit fires from becoming wildland fires by burning early in the season. Wet and snowy winter conditions, hinder the rapid spread of fire on or under the ground. Weather conditions and increased fire danger may lead to many days when burning cannot be allowed to take place.

Alternatives to Open Burning

Open burning releases large amounts of carbon dioxide, other gases, and solid substances directly into the air, which can contribute to respiratory problems. Disposal of natural materials is never as good for the environment as using them again in a different form. Tree limbs, brush and other forestry debris can be chipped or composted into landscaping material. Check with your local public works or highway department; many have chippers at their municipal recycling center or transfer station, and will process debris from homeowners.