

## Learn Before You Burn

In Minnesota, whenever we get a break from snow on the ground, you are likely to find family and friends gathering in backyards for an evening of good company. According to a state survey, backyard fires are becoming a more frequent part of backyard gatherings than in years past. Indeed, gathering around a campfire is an idyllic way for many people to spend time during Minnesota summers.

Unfortunately, with more fires also comes more smoke. And while wood smoke may smell good to some, it is not good for you or our air quality. While many traditional sources of air pollution are emitting less and less, pollution from wood smoke is a growing concern in the Twin Cities area and it has a particularly large impact on your friends and family gathered in the backyard, as well as your neighbors.

Though a wood fire is never pollution free, there are steps you can take to reduce the smoke if you do choose to have a fire. Here are some simple steps to learn before you burn:

- Burn dry, well-aged wood that has been split properly into pieces that will catch fire and burn thoroughly. Wood should be stored under a cover but with the ability for air to circulate around it. This can be as simple as keeping a tarp over the top of the wood stack, but not covering the sides. Wood should be allowed to age for six months or longer, depending on wood type. Properly dried wood is often darker, has cracks in the end grain, and makes a “hollow sound” when smacked against another piece of wood.
- It is important never to burn household garbage, painted or stained wood, plastics, or chemically treated paper in your backyard fire. Not only is this practice illegal, it is also hazardous and dangerous to you, your family and to your neighbors.
- Make sure your fire is well constructed and not left to smolder. Extinguish the fire completely when you are done.
- Be considerate of your neighbors when you burn. Talk with your neighbors before having a fire. Do they have health issues that may be impacted by smoke? Listen to neighbors whose health can be harmed by your fires. Even if they don't have health conditions, let your neighbors know you are going to have a fire so they can close windows. It is important to note that closing windows will not prevent wood smoke from affecting neighbors with respiratory conditions.
- Consider a natural gas or propane fire pit instead of burning wood. They are easier and cleaner. Similarly, not every backyard get together needs a fire. It can be just as nice to spend time with your family and friends, without having to feed a fire or move around to avoid the smoke.

Wood smoke can make bad air days worse and you should not burn when air pollution health advisories have been issued in your area. Some local governments even prohibit backyard fires on days the “air quality index” is above 100, the level at which air pollution impacts sensitive groups. To know when air pollution has reached unhealthy levels in your area, sign up for air alerts at [www.pca.state.mn.us](http://www.pca.state.mn.us).

Burning smarter will help you have a more enjoyable experience, make cleanup easier and help reduce smoke and pollutants for both you and your neighbors. For more tips on reducing smoke and protecting your family, visit [LearnBeforeYouBurn.com](http://LearnBeforeYouBurn.com).