

# Learn Before You Burn for Better Fires

Recreational fires are growing in popularity in backyards all across Minnesota. As the amount of wood burning in the metro area has grown, so has the number of complaints from people sensitive to smoke or who live with a respiratory condition that is made worse by exposure to wood smoke.

It is important to note that all wood burning creates some smoke and particulate pollution, and that no fire can ever be 100 percent pollution-free. However, some simple steps will help to reduce wood smoke and other pollution that can pose health risks to you, your family, and your neighbors. They also may help to reduce conflicts with neighbors and prevent police or fire officials from having to step in to resolve conflicts.

Here are some simple steps you can take to burn smarter:

- 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. Properly dried wood is often darker, has cracks in the end grain, and makes a “hollow sound” when smacked against another piece of wood. Firewood moisture meters are available at hardware and fireplace specialty stores. You will want wood that has a moisture content of 20% or less.
- 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. Burn only dry wood aged six months or more or manufactured fire logs.
- Make sure your fire is well constructed and not left to smolder. Extinguish the fire completely when you are done.
- Finally, be considerate of your neighbors when you burn. Talk with your neighbors before having a fire. Do your fires cause health issues for them? Listen to neighbors who may suffer from your campfires. Even if they don't have health conditions, let your neighbors know you are going to have a fire so they can close windows.
- Consider a natural gas or propane fire pit instead of burning wood. They are easier and cleaner.

Wood smoke may smell nice, but that smoke is not good for you. If you choose to burn, 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).