

Learn Before You Burn

Fires produce smoke that may smell good to some, but can be hazardous for others. If you choose to have a fire, consider the information below to help reduce smoke and its health impacts. 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.



Use only dry, aged wood



Wood should be split, stacked and covered for six months or more before burning. Wood should be stored under a cover 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 without 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. Use only wood that has a moisture content of 20% or less.



Burn only firewood

Never 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.

Yard waste should not be burned either. Check with your county about drop-off or pick-up options for yard waste.

Never let a fire smolder

Hot-burning fires create a more complete combustion that decreases the amount of pollution generated. A poorly constructed fire or a fire left to smolder can produce large amounts of unhealthy smoke and makes a backyard fire much less enjoyable. Extinguish the fire completely when you are done.



Disposable plates & utensils should not be disposed of in your fire. Keep a trash bag handy for these, and recycle cans and bottles.

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Talk with your neighbors before a fire

Be considerate of your neighbors when you burn. Do your fires cause health issues for them? Listen to neighbors who may suffer from your backyard 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.

- Wood smoke and your health, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency <http://bit.ly/woodPCA>

Don't burn on air alert days

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 can start to impact sensitive groups. To know when air pollution has reached unhealthy levels in your area, sign up for [AirNow air alerts via email](#), [download the Minnesota Air mobile app](#), or see daily updates on [Twitter](#) (@mpca_aqi).

Consider alternatives to burning wood

There are many backyard fire features that use fuels other than wood. Consider a natural gas or propane fire pit instead. They are easier and cleaner than using wood.

Not every backyard evening 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.



Resources

Visit LearnBeforeYouBurn.com for links to free woodshed building plans, videos, resources on health impacts of wood smoke, and more.