

# burnoutdoors?

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FOLLOW THE RULES

CALL BEFORE YOU BURN



OUTDOOR BURNING RULES FOR SPOKANE COUNTY

# Outdoor Burning Rules for Spokane County



This brochure is a cooperative effort by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and the Spokane Regional Clean

Air Agency, along with our fire district partners. Each of these agencies is involved in outdoor burning programs in Spokane County.

The focus of this brochure is on three types of outdoor burning: residential yard and garden debris, silvicultural (forest) debris, and recreational fires.

The only material that may be burned in Washington state is natural vegetation, and only under specific program requirements.

In an effort to reduce the harmful effects of breathing smoky air, the state legislature called for the gradual reduction and/or elimination of outdoor burning across the state, beginning in 1991. Now, outdoor burning is limited to outlying areas of the county that are less populated and have fewer commercially available alternatives to burning. Except for recreational fires, outdoor burning is not allowed in any of Spokane County's 13 incorporated cities, towns or their Urban Growth Areas (UGAs).

Burning is still a useful tool for forest landowners to remove hazardous fuels and restore forest health. Landowners should exercise caution and follow burn rules and permit conditions to avoid escapement or creating a smoke nuisance.

The type of natural vegetation you wish to burn and where you live determines whether or not you can burn and what rules apply.

**B**urning responsibly is the best way to prevent unwanted wildfires and thousands of dollars in suppression costs. Escaped debris burns are a leading cause of wildfires in the state of Washington. This brochure is full of information and tips to help you burn safely and legally.

## What are you going to burn?

### RESIDENTIAL YARD AND GARDEN DEBRIS

is comprised of leaves, needles, tree and shrub prunings, and other natural yard and garden waste originating on residential improved property.

Burning residential yard and garden debris is not allowed in Spokane County.\*\* Alternatives to burning this type of debris must be utilized.

**See pages 3 and 4**

**\*\* Exception:** If you reside within the boundaries of Spokane County Fire Districts 2, 5, 11 or 12 and outside urban growth areas, you may be eligible to purchase a written permit to burn from your fire district.

### SILVICULTURAL DEBRIS

consists of trees, stumps, limbs, needles, etc., generated on unimproved property.

You may be eligible to burn silvicultural debris on unimproved property that is outside of urban growth areas on DNR-protected lands.

Unimproved\* property is the area beyond your improved property, such as lands that are not irrigated, mowed, or otherwise maintained. This includes timbered pastures, brush lands, scrub forests, and forests. Burning silvicultural debris on unimproved property falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources.

**See pages 5 and 6**

### CAMPFIRES AND RECREATIONAL FIRES

includes outdoor camp/cooking fires, backyard barbecues, chimeneas and other patio warmers.

Recreational fires are allowed throughout Spokane County, under specific rules and conditions.

Avoid purchasing outdoor wood-fired devices. These are uncontrolled and inefficient devices that can create a nuisance to neighbors and pose safety and health concerns. Instead, choose a device that uses natural gas, propane or electricity.

**See pages 7 and 8**

#### \* Unimproved lands

means those lands that will support grass, brush and tree growth, or other flammable material when such lands are not cleared or cultivated and, in the opinion of the department, are a fire menace to life and property. (RCW 76.04.005)

# OPTIONS FOR HANDLING YARD AND GARDEN DEBRIS

## Grasscycling



- ▶ Grasscycling is a simple, natural approach to lawn care. Any lawn mower can recycle grass clippings. Just remove the grass bag/catcher. Mowers specifically designed for mulching are available and they produce finer clippings for grasscycling.
- ▶ Grass clippings are a natural organic fertilizer. Your lawn retains its health because each time you mow, you return valuable nutrients and moisture to the soil.
- ▶ Grasscycling does not cause thatch—it is caused by improper watering. Here are some more tips for grasscycling:
- ▶ Mow when the grass is dry. Never cut off more than 1/3 of the grass blade in one mowing. Keep grass mowed to 2" in early spring. Gradually raise

## Composting

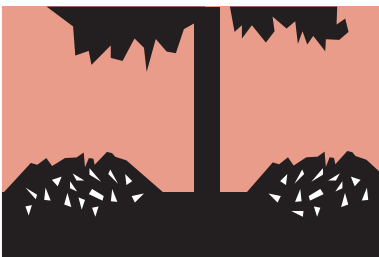


- ▶ Home composting is an economical and convenient alternative to bagging yard debris that is usually picked up or hauled by you to transfer stations. Composting takes ordinary yard and kitchen waste and transforms it into a superior soil amendment. Your plants will be healthier and more able to deal with insects and disease. Compost also aids in water absorption and minimizes the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Steps to building a compost pile:**
- ▶ Choose a site close to a water source if possible and preferably in the shade. Start your compost pile on bare earth to allow worms and other beneficial organisms to enter your pile and begin the decomposition process.

## Chipping and Mulching



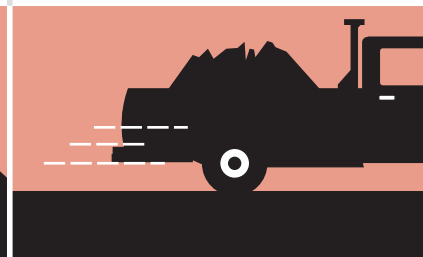
- ▶ Some residents choose to chip their branches and other wood debris. Chippers may be rented or a chipping service hired to take care of your material.
- ▶ Wood chips make excellent mulch around trees and shrubs and can also be used to soften garden paths.
- ▶ Mulching keeps the soil loose and moist, smothers weeds, prevents soil loss, and releases nutrients as it decomposes.
- ▶ By mulching, we can easily put nature's recycling system to work in our own backyard. Spread yard and garden debris around shrubs, trees, and other plantings.
- ▶ Mulch in your own backyard with natural materials: dried grass, chipped woody material,



**Burning yard and garden debris is prohibited in most areas of Spokane County.**

**Curbside Collection**  
Check with your garbage hauler to see if curbside collection of yard/garden debris is offered in your area.

## Hauling



- ▶ Rake up your excess material and haul it to your nearest Recycling Transfer Station, see maps below. A special "clean green" rate may be available.
- ▶ Call the Recycling Hot Line at (509) 625-6800 or visit [www.solidwaste.org](http://www.solidwaste.org) for more information, clean green rates, and hours at the Recycling Transfer Stations and Waste to Energy Facility.
- ▶ If you choose to haul your material, be sure to secure your load to prevent littering and potential fines.
- ▶ If you are unable to haul your debris, there are private hauling services listed in the phone book or by doing an online search. If you use a private hauler, request to see the disposal receipt prior to payment to help combat illegal dumping.

the mower's cutting height to 3" by summer then gradually lower back down to 2" by fall.

- ▶ Keep your mower blades sharp. Dull blades tear the grass giving the turf a brownish cast.
- ▶ If the grass has gotten too high, mow over it a second time to further shred the clippings.
- ▶ To prevent excess growth between clippings, raise the mower height, mow, then gradually lower it over several mowings. This will also reduce shock to the grass from cutting too much at once.

For workshop dates and locations, **contact the Recycling Hot Line at (509) 625-6800 or visit [www.solidwaste.org](http://www.solidwaste.org)**

▶ Add compostable materials, alternating moist "green" with dry "brown." Add water as you mix materials (should feel like a wrung out sponge). Moist "green" ingredients are fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags (minus the staples), fresh grass clippings, green leaves or plant trimmings. Dry "brown" materials are straw, dry leaves, chipped branches and pine needles, shredded newspaper, sawdust and wood ashes. If you use sawdust or wood ashes, sprinkle in small amounts so it doesn't clump together and slow down the entire process. A rule of thumb is to use 2 parts green to 1 part brown.

▶ Build pile to 3' x 3' x 3', but no larger than 5' x 5' x 5' for maximum efficiency.

▶ For the fastest decomposition, turn the pile with a pitchfork once a week to aerate it. Oxygen is required for the process to work and aerating provides this oxygen. If you don't need compost immediately, your pile can be turned less frequently. Remember to add more water if it is dry.

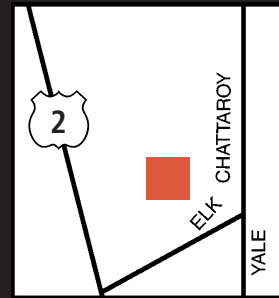
**Note:** Finished compost still contains material that hasn't fully decomposed. You can sift out the larger pieces if you prefer, but it is not absolutely necessary.

or pine needles. Spread these materials around trees, shrubs and throughout garden beds. It looks good and saves water!

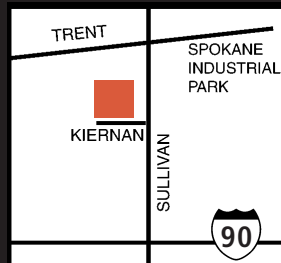
- ▶ Mulch inhibits weeds, retains moisture and releases nutrients as it decomposes.
- ▶ Most horticultural information advises laying 2-4" of organic mulch, depending on the type of material.
- ▶ Keep mulch at least 1-2" away from plant trunks or stems.

## Recycling Transfer Stations

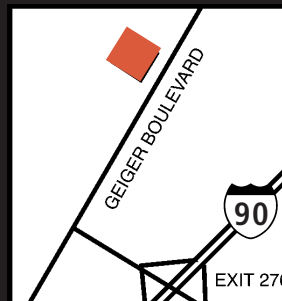
Call the Recycling Hot Line at (509) 625-6800 or visit [www.solidwaste.org](http://www.solidwaste.org) for information on clean green rates and hours at the following Recycling Transfer Stations:



**North County Facility**  
22123 Elk-Chatarray Road,  
at the intersection of  
Elk-Chatarray Road and Hwy 2.



**Valley Facility**  
3941 N. Sullivan Road,  
south of Trent across  
from the Spokane  
Industrial Park.



**Waste to Energy Facility**  
2900 South Geiger Blvd.,  
west of Spokane, across  
from the Washington  
State Patrol.



## Regulations for Silvicultural Burning

JURISDICTION OF THE WASHINGTON STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES (DNR)

**You may be eligible to burn silvicultural debris on unimproved property if the property is outside of incorporated cities/towns and urban growth areas. Some restricted burning is allowed inside the Smoke Sensitive Area—see definitions on right.**

### **NO PERMIT IS REQUIRED IF THE BURN MEETS ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA (RULE BURN):**

▶ **Burn no more than one pile 4 feet across at any one time**, and each pile must be completely extinguished before lighting another.

▶ Create a fire break around the pile by constructing a barrier to bare mineral soil with no flammable material.

▶ Keep a shovel and connected water hose or at least 5 gallons of water nearby.

▶ A person capable of extinguishing the fire must be in attendance at all times while burning.

▶ **Burn only in calm or light winds:** Don't burn when the wind is swaying trees, extending flags or causing rough waves on the water.

▶ Burning may not occur during an air quality or fire safety burn ban. Call **(509) 477-4710** prior to burning.

▶ The pile may only consist of clean, natural vegetation, free of dirt and stumps.

Call DNR's Northeast Region Office in Colville at **(509) 685-6900** to acquire a burn permit. Allow up to two weeks for the permit.

### **BURN BANS**



**Outdoor burning may be completely suspended by the DNR at any time. Such tight restrictions may be announced due to high fire danger resulting from weather conditions, specific wildfire conditions, lack of available firefighting personnel, or to protect air quality.**

### **A DNR PERMIT IS REQUIRED FOR:**

▶ Any burning that cannot meet all the previous standards listed in this brochure.

▶ Burning of any machine-piled material.

▶ Burning within 500 feet of forest slash piles and 50 feet of structures.

▶ **Find a burn permit fee schedule in the Business and Permits area of [www.dnr.wa.gov](http://www.dnr.wa.gov)**

### **Unimproved Property**

**Lands that are not irrigated, mowed, or otherwise maintained including timbered pastures, brush lands, scrub forests, and forests.**

### **Smoke Sensitive Area**

**An area of Spokane County that is prone to elevated air pollution levels due to population density and/or geographical features that trap pollutants. Additional restrictions may apply when burning silvicultural debris within this area. Contact DNR before burning for more information, (509) 685-6900**

### **Keep your fire safe and legal**

**DNR investigates and pursues recovery of all reasonable expenses for wildfires started through negligence on DNR-protected lands. Follow your permit to stay safe and legal.**

# Silvicultural Burning



If you have more questions about silvicultural burning, contact the Department of Natural Resources, Northeast Region, in Colville at (509) 685-6900 or visit their website at [www.dnr.wa.gov](http://www.dnr.wa.gov)

## Rule Burn

A FIRE THAT DOES NOT REQUIRE A WRITTEN PERMIT



4 feet or less

Not more than one burn pile at a time.



NO MORE THAN ONE PILE

## Permit Burn

A WRITTEN PERMIT IS REQUIRED IF THE PILE EXCEEDS 4 FEET.

Burning of any material, except natural vegetation from unimproved property, is prohibited.



Burning may not occur during an air quality or fire safety burn ban. Before burning, call (509) 477-4710 for current conditions.

**TIP** Dry fuel burns hot, clean, and quick. Avoid burning wet debris. A clean fire creates less smoke.

At least one person who is capable of putting the fire out must be in attendance at all times, with a means to contact 9-1-1 if needed.



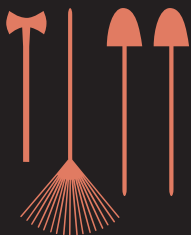
Burn only in calm or light winds that do not exceed 7-10 miles per hour.



Keep a shovel and a charged water hose or one 5-gallon bucket of water.

See permit for specific recommendations and requirements.

The pile must be clean, silvicultural vegetation, free of dirt and stumps.



Keep shovels, axes and a rake on site.

50 FEET OR MORE AWAY

### RULE BURN

Burn pile must be 50 feet away from any structure, standing timber, or power lines. Burns must be 500 feet from logging slash. Contact DNR offices for more details.

4 FEET OR LESS

### PERMITTED BURN

A written permit is required if the pile exceeds 4 feet.

# Campfires



If you have more questions about campfires, contact the Department of Natural Resources, Northeast Region, in Colville at (509) 685-6900 or visit their website at [www.dnr.wa.gov](http://www.dnr.wa.gov)

**No burning is allowed on state land except in designated campgrounds.**



Burning of any material, except firewood, is prohibited.

## **BURNING MAY NOT OCCUR DURING AN OUTDOOR BURNING BAN**

**A burn ban due to impaired air quality** is issued by Spokane Clean Air when fine smoke particles are measured at unhealthy levels. No burning is allowed during this period.

**A burn ban due to high fire danger** is announced by fire officials during extended periods of dry weather.

**For current burning conditions** in Spokane County, call the Burn Info Hotline at (509) 477-4710 or online at [www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org)

## **Keep the campfire small.**

A good bed of coals or a small fire surrounded by rocks gives plenty of heat.

## **Burn dry, clean wood.**

Dry wood burns hotter and faster. Avoid burning wet, woody debris. Dry, clean wood creates less smoke.

## **Never leave a campfire unattended.**

Even a small breeze can quickly cause the fire to spread. The fire must be attended at all times by a person capable of extinguishing it quickly.

## **Completely extinguish the fire.**

Drown the fire with water. Mix it to ensure all embers, coals, and sticks are wet. Move rocks—there may be burning embers underneath. Keep a charged hose or one 5-gallon bucket of water, and a shovel or rake on hand at all times.

Clear a firebreak around your campfire that is free of flammable material.

**4.5 FEET OR MORE**

**3 FEET OR LESS FIRE WIDTH**

**25 FEET**

The fire should be **25 feet** away from any structure or standing timber.



# Recreational Fires



If you have more questions about outdoor burning or any other air quality topic, contact the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency, (509) 477-4727 or visit their website at [www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org)

## Recreational fires must be no larger than 3 feet in diameter.

The fire cannot be used as a disposal fire—i.e., paper, natural vegetation/yard debris, garbage, etc.

## The only legal fuel to burn is charcoal, natural gas, propane and firewood.

The wood must be dry, clean, and natural (untreated) wood or manufactured logs.



## BURNING MAY NOT OCCUR DURING AN OUTDOOR BURNING BAN

### A burn ban due to impaired air quality

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is announced by fire officials during extended periods of dry weather.

### For current burning conditions

in Spokane County, call the Burn Info Hotline at (509) 477-4710 or online at [www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org)

## Be considerate of your neighbors.

Don't burn on days when air quality is deteriorating—usually on calm days with little ventilation.

## Don't burn on windy days when fire may escape.

The fire must be attended at all times by a person capable of extinguishing it quickly.

## Burn only dry, clean wood.

Wood that has been split to dry at least 9-12 months burns cleaner than wet green wood. Dry, clean wood creates less smoke.

The fire must not cause a nuisance to your neighbors (e.g., visible smoke, excessive odors traveling onto their property).

Clear a firebreak around your recreational fire that is free of flammable material.

3 FEET  
OR LESS  
FIRE WIDTH

Wood and charcoal fueled fires must be at least **25 feet away** from any structure.



There may be other local rules that apply to the use of a recreational fire, such as homeowner association covenants, rental agreements, fire protection issues, etc.

ILLUSTRATION IS NOT TO SCALE

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Can construction and demolition debris be burned?**

It is illegal to burn mill ends, lumber, or any construction, renovation, or demolition materials.

## **When is burning considered a nuisance?**

Smoke, odor, or ash that unreasonably impacts neighboring properties is illegal. Call Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency, (509) 477-4727, to report all smoke-related complaints.

## **May I have a recreational fire larger than 3 feet in diameter?**

Only if it meets the requirement of a social event fire. Social event fires are associated with a public event or celebration. These fires are typically limited to 10' x 5' and may not be used for the purpose of disposal. A written permit is required for these fires. Contact Spokane Clean Air at (509) 477-4727 for details.

## **I moved out to the country, may I use a burn barrel to burn paper waste?**

Burning garbage including paper products is prohibited in Washington. In 2000, the state legislature banned burn barrels statewide.

Smoke from burn barrels is noxious because the fires burn at low temperatures, receiving very little oxygen and producing excessive smoke and other toxic substances.

## **Why are there restrictions on burning?**

Burning natural firewood creates smoke, a health concern for everyone breathing it. Smoke contains microscopic particles that contain toxic compounds, such as polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons.

When inhaled, fine particles collect in the lungs, causing structural and chemical changes and damaging the alveoli (tiny air sacs where oxygen enters the blood stream). The small particles act as carriers for other toxic materials.

Those of greatest risk are young children, the elderly, and those with existing heart or lung diseases. Consider the alternatives before burning firewood.

## **May I burn my branches and yard trimmings in my recreational fire?**

No. Recreational fires cannot be used as disposal fires. Yard and garden debris may be handled in a variety of ways as described on pages 3 and 4 of this brochure.

A fine of \$400 or more may be assessed if you burn yard waste or other prohibited material.

## **What about agricultural burning?**

Agricultural burning may be allowed, by permit or exemption, for agricultural operations. An agricultural operation means a farmer who can substantiate that the operation is commercial agriculture. A farmer means any person engaged in the business of growing or producing any

## Other Resources

### **Outdoor Burning in Spokane County (except Silvicultural)**

**Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency**

(509) 477-4727 (office)

(509) 477-4710

(24-hr Burn Info Line)

[www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org)

### **Silvicultural Debris Burning in Eastern Washington**

**Washington State**

**Department of Natural**

**Resources, Northeast Region,**

**in Colville:** (509) 685-6900

### **Outdoor Burning in Eastern Washington (outside Spokane County)**

**Washington State**

**Department of Ecology,**

**Eastern Region Office**

(509) 329-3400

### **Composting, Recycling, Waste Reduction and Disposal**

**Spokane Regional Solid Waste System**

(509) 625-6800

[www.solidwaste.org](http://www.solidwaste.org)

**I am thinking about purchasing a wood burning device for backyard gatherings. What do I need to know?**

These types of devices generally fall under the category of recreational fires and are currently allowed, although they could be banned during impaired air quality or fire danger conditions.

It's also important to know that your fire must not cause a nuisance to your neighbors by allowing smoke and odors to travel onto their property. It is always illegal to smoke out your neighbors.

If smoke from your recreational fire bothers your neighbors, poses a threat or causes damage to their property or otherwise causes a nuisance, you must put it out immediately. For these reasons, you may want to consider a natural gas, propane or electric-fueled device.

A fine of \$400 or more may be assessed if you burn yard waste or other prohibited material.

**Can I burn needles, leaves, branches or trees from my improved property under the silvicultural burning?**

No. Natural vegetation from your improved property falls under residential yard and garden debris burning. Refer to page 2 for definitions.

agricultural product for sale, upon their own lands or the land in which they have a present right of possession. Contact Spokane Clean Air for more information, (509) 477-4727.

**What if there is natural disaster, like a storm or flood, that results in a lot of debris?**

Storm or flood debris burning is defined as fires consisting of natural vegetation, deposited on lands by storms or floods that have occurred in the previous two years and resulted in an emergency being declared or proclaimed in the area by the city, county, or state government and burned on such lands by the property owner or his or her designee (RCW 70.94.743 (1)(c)). Burning is not allowed inside Urban Growth Areas, inside Spokane Clean Air's No Burn Area, or where burning would likely cause smoke impacts to neighbors.

**I just bought some property and plan to clear it to build a house. May I burn the slash?**

Through an agreement between Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) limited residential land clearing burning from less than one acre of forested land on a five-acre or larger parcel in non-commercial ownership may be permitted by DNR with associated silvicultural debris from the unimproved property. Burning is not allowed inside incorporated cities/towns and urban growth areas.

**Your fire must not cause a nuisance to your neighbors by allowing smoke and odors to travel onto their property. It is always illegal to smoke out your neighbors.**





WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**  
Peter Goldmark – Commissioner of Public Lands

[www.dnr.wa.gov](http://www.dnr.wa.gov)

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225 S. SILKE ROAD  
PO BOX 190  
COLVILLE, WA 99114-0190



[www.SpokaneCleanAir.org](http://www.SpokaneCleanAir.org)

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