burn outdoors?

FOLLOW THE RULES | CALL BEFORE YOU BURN

OUTDOOR BURNING RULES FOR SPOKANE COUNTY
burning 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 do you want 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

**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 area 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)

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

Grasscutting 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 grasscutting.

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.

Grasscutting does not cause thatch—it is caused by improper watering. Here are some more tips for grasscutting:

- 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 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 composting workshop dates and locations, call the Recycling Information Line at (509) 477-6800 or visit www.spokanecounty solidwaste.org

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.
- 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.

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, 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.

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 Information Line at (509) 477-6800 or visit www.spokanecounty 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.

Recycling Transfer Stations

Call the Recycling Information Line at (509) 477-6800 or visit www.spokanecounty solidwaste.org for information on clean green rates and hours at the following Recycling Transfer Stations:

North County Facility
22123 Elk-Chattaroy Road, at the intersection of Elk-Chattaroy 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.

Spokane Valley University Transfer Station
2405 N. University Rd. Spokane Valley, WA 99206
For hours and rates call (509) 924-5678 or visit sunshinedisposal.com/commercial/transfer-station
Regulations for Silvicultural Burning

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 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

PERMITTED BURN

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

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

Rule Burn

An outdoor fire that does not require a written permit.

4 feet or less

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

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

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.

Permit Burn

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

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.

See permit for specific recommendations and requirements.

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

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

3 FEET OR LESS FIRE WIDTH

4.5 FEET OR MORE

25 FEET

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

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

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.

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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.
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.

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.

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. 

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.

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 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.

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

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 County Regional Solid Waste System
(509) 477-6800
spokanecountysolidwaste.org

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