

Open Burning Safety and Regulations from MASS.gov

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The Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and your local fire department limit open burning for public health and safety reasons. State fire wardens determine each day whether conditions are safe for open burning.

Weather and air quality can change rapidly, especially in the spring, and fire departments can rescind permits when that happens.

Open Burning Permits & Restrictions:

Open burning is allowed from mid-winter to early spring across most of Massachusetts. **It is prohibited at all times in the following cities and towns:** Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, Medford, New Bedford, Newton, Somerville, Springfield, Waltham, Watertown, West Springfield, Worcester.

If open burning is allowed in your community, you must obtain an open burning permit in advance through your local fire department. Failure to comply with Open Burning regulations can result in your permit(s) being rescinded by the Fire Department.

Open burning must be done between January 15 to May 1:

- **Between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. All fires must be extinguished at out by 4:00 p.m. daily!**
- At least **75 feet from all buildings**
- As close as possible to the source of material being burned
- When air quality is acceptable for burning.
- You must have/keep the burn permit accessible. The fire department can ask to see your permit at any time.

What can I burn? You are allowed to burn:

- Brush, cane, driftwood and forestry debris (but not from commercial or industrial land clearing)
- Agricultural materials including fruit tree and bush prunings, raspberry stalks, and infected bee hives for disease control.
- Trees and brush from agricultural land clearing
- Fungus-infected elm wood, if no other acceptable means of disposal is available

You may not burn:

- Leaves
- Brush, trees, cane or driftwood from commercial or industrial land clearing
- Grass, hay, leaves, stumps or tires
- Construction materials or demolition debris
- Household trash

How do I safely start & tend a fire?

- An adult should always be present and attend the fire until it is completely extinguished. Keep children and pets a safe distance away.
- Burn away from any utility lines.
- Use paper and kindling to start the fire and add progressively larger pieces of wood. **To avoid the risk of personal injury, never use gasoline, kerosene or other flammable liquid as a fire starter.**
- Burn only 1 small pile of material at a time and slowly add to it. This helps keep the fire from getting out of control.
- Keep fire extinguishing materials handy. These should include a water supply, shovels and rakes. The water supply can be a pressurized water fire extinguisher, pump can, or garden hose. Test the water source before lighting the fire.
- Put the fire out if winds pick up or the weather changes. Use common sense. If the fire gets out of control, call the fire local department right away to prevent personal injury and property damage.

You could be held liable for firefighting costs, as well as face fines or jail time, if you burn illegally or allow a fire to get out of control (see M.G.L. c.48, s.13).

What times are best for open burning?

You can help prevent wildland fires by burning early in the season. Wet and snowy winter conditions help hinder the rapid spread of fire on or under the ground. ***Changing weather conditions and increased fire danger in spring can lead to many days when open burning is not allowed.*** April is usually the worst month for brush fires.

Again, open burning is only allowed in Massachusetts from January 15 to May 1 between the hours of 10:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m. All fires must be fully extinguished and out by 4:00 p.m.

In Massachusetts, your open burn permit can be rescinded at any time by the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ), in this case the local Fire Chief or their designee.

What are the alternatives to open burning?

Ask your public works or solid waste department if your community chips or composts natural debris into landscaping material.

What other types of outdoor fires are allowed?

Only with the fire department's approval and supervision, a community may schedule:

- Christmas tree burning between December 26 and January 7 (although recycling trees or “planting” them in dunes to control beach erosion are more beneficial to the environment)
- One ceremonial bonfire each year to observe a municipal, state or national event
- A bonfire between July 2 and July 6 in observance of Independence Day
- Outdoor cooking is allowed year-round in all communities and is not subject to open burning limits.
- With specific approval from MassDEP, local fire departments may also stage outdoor fires for purposes of fire prevention or protection research and training

What about fire pits?

Fire pits have become popular in recent years. But unless they are being used primarily for cooking, they are technically subject to the MassDEP open burning regulation. If you do use a fire pit for cooking, the fire must be:

- Kept to a reasonable size
- Located away from combustible materials
- Contained in a non-flammable enclosure, and
- Tended by someone who is 18 years of age or older.
- Remember to burn only clean, dry firewood. This will minimize the amount of smoke leaving your property and affecting neighbors. You may not burn trash, refuse or similar materials.
- ***Some cities and towns regulate, limit or prohibit the use of chimeneas, fire pits and outdoor fireplaces. To find out if your community has specific requirements, contact your local fire department.***