

Summer Safety Tips for Outdoor Cooking and Recreational Fires

For many, summertime in Oregon, with its warm weather and late sunsets, means backyard recreational fires and outdoor cooking. Here are a few things you should know before striking that match so you can burn cleanly and responsibly for your family and neighbors.

Summer safety starts with healthy air.

Smoke from burning wood is a complex mixture of gases and fine particles, also called particle pollution or particulate matter. Outdoor recreational fires can be a significant source of harmful particle pollution, especially in some metro areas. Children, older adults and people with heart or lung disease, e.g., asthma and COPD can be particularly sensitive to the [health effects of particle pollution in wood smoke](#).

Small steps can improve air quality, avoid injuries and prevent wildfires. Be a good neighbor when burning and consider wind direction and dryness of your wood.



Tips for cooking outdoors

Nearly 9,000 home fires per year involve grills, according to a [National Fire Protection Association report](#). Some tips to keeping your grill safe and fire-free include:

- Keep an eye on what you are cooking and your heat source.
- Maintain a clean cooking area that is clear of combustibles, e.g., potholders, food packaging, towels, etc.
- Create a three-foot kid- and pet-free zone around the heat source.
- Supervise children around fires and barbecues.
- Always keep water and a fire extinguisher on hand.

Burn responsibly

Due to wildfire danger, summer burn bans are often in effect throughout Oregon. Check with [local authorities](#)

before you burn. Violating burn bans can result in enforcement and fines.



You can have barbecues using standard equipment, ceremonial fires for large gatherings or institutions and recreational fires. There may be a local city or county ordinance requiring a permit. Always check with your local fire department before burning.

Keep yourself, your house and your neighbors safe with these tips:

- Keep fires small and contained. The fire should be less than 3 feet in diameter with a pile less than 2 feet high.
- Recreational fires should be kept away from structures, including decks.
- Only use seasoned, dry wood, which burns hotter and cleaner and releases less particulate matter.
- **Do not** burn wood during air quality alert days, when air pollution is already higher.

Never leave a fire unattended. Keep a shovel and water nearby to extinguish any escaped embers and always have a fire extinguisher available. Select a site away from grasses, shrubs, overhanging branches and stacked firewood. Take extra care if you live in a region where brush fires are of concern. The [Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal](#) offers additional tips [here](#).

Avoid harmful air toxins by properly disposing of waste. You should never burn the following materials:

- Asbestos
- Asphalt or industrial waste
- Automotive parts, including frames
- Dead animals
- Plastic and rubber products
- Tires



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DEQ is a leader in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of Oregon's air, land and water.

- Waste oil, petroleum treated and related materials
- Wet garbage and food waste
- Any material creating dense smoke or noxious odors

Consider cleaner alternatives

Learn about your options before burning wood in your backyard. Switching to natural gas or propane reduces harmful air pollutants. Kits that convert existing fire rings and pits to natural gas or propane burners are available at hearth and patio stores.

Know your air quality before you burn

[The Air Quality Index](#) is a daily index of air quality that reports how clean the air is and provides information on potential health risks. You can also download the free Oregon DEQ app *OregonAir* to your smartphone to know the current air quality.



Check your local Laws

It is against the [law](#) to conduct any open burning that:

- Unreasonably interferes with enjoyment of life or property
- Creates a public or private nuisance
- Creates a hazard to public safety

Check with your [local fire department](#) and [air quality agency](#) to learn more about burning in Oregon and the [Oregon Department of Forestry](#) for fire protection information. You can also read additional fact sheets on [types of burning](#) and how to dispose of [yard debris](#).

Alternative formats

DEQ can provide documents in an alternate format or in a language other than English upon request. Call DEQ at 800-452-4011 or email deqinfo@deq.state.or.us.