

Question of the Month: (May 2010)

*“In previous years I’ve been able to burn a pile of yard debris but recently heard this isn’t allowed. Can you please clarify if I can burn or not?”*

Short answer: Call your local fire district (numbers provided below) for permitting information and the Department of Environmental Quality at (800)-633-6247 for current air quality. Ok, there is a bit more than that but those two calls are the most important in regards to getting direction on open burning.

This is the perfect timing for this question as people are cleaning up their property after the winter and spring. We won’t discuss the burning of “slash” piles which typically refer to the large piles of tree limbs and allowable debris as a result of a commercial logging venture, as this falls under different regulations and contacting the Department of Lands for specific requirements is necessary.

But let’s go ahead and look at the type of burning many of the area’s residents wish to do this time of year. As a member of the Kootenai County Fire Prevention Cooperative, consisting of all area fire districts, Idaho Department of Lands, United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the Coeur d’Alene Tribe; we hear from residents all the time who are unaware of the guidelines for open/outdoor burning.

I will attempt to simplify an often confusing web of agencies and rules. Perhaps the most important and easiest answer is: If you plan to burn yard waste or want to use a burn barrel, you need to make two important contacts. The first would be your local fire protection agency to learn of any specific permits or regulations they require (contact numbers provided below).

The second contact that **MUST** be made each and every day you plan to burn is to the Department of Environmental Quality at 1-800-633-6247. This is a pre-recorded message of current air quality. Open burning can **ONLY** be done on **GREEN** days. **YELLOW** and **RED** air quality days are closed for open burning.

Following are general outdoor burning regulations and suggestions for homeowners throughout Kootenai County:

- 1) Burning is allowed during daylight hours only. Fires must be totally out by dark.
- 2) Fires must be attended at all times.
- 3) A water hose and/or shovel or adequate fire suppression tools must be on scene at all times.
- 4) Burning of construction debris by contractors and commercial trade waste is prohibited. Hauling of debris from one property to another to burn is prohibited.
- 5) The fire shall be a minimum of 50 ft. from any structure unless the pile is less than 2 ft. high and 3 ft. wide, in which case 25 ft. is adequate. (If fire is in an approved burning device, check with your district to see allowable distance from other structures)

- 6) All the following debris is allowed if it is dry: untreated wood, pine needles, lawn clippings, garden waste, leaves and branches.
- 7) NO treated wood products, plastics, rubber, paint, fiberglass, pallets, stumps (roots), household garbage or non-combustible items are allowed.
- 8) If smoke emissions are offensive to occupants of surrounding properties, fire officials are authorized to require immediate discontinuation of burning.

**Special notes...**

**Burn barrels:** Check with your local fire protection agency to learn if any permitting or regulations are in effect for their use.

**Changing conditions:** All residents are responsible for being aware and monitoring changing weather conditions which may require additional precautions. If the wind picks up and the potential to spread hot embers to nearby combustible materials is possible, the fire should be extinguished immediately. Also, if the hot, dry days continue throughout the summer, additional restrictions on open burning may be imposed.

**Fire Districts in Kootenai County**

Coeur d’Alene	(208) 769-2340
East Side	(208) 769-4269
Hauser Lake	(208) 773-1174
Idaho Dept. of Lands-Mica	(208) 769-1577
Kootenai County Fire and Rescue	(208) 765-1112
Mica-Kidd Island	(208) 769-7946
Northern Lakes	(208) 772-5711
Shoshone County Fire District #2	(208) 784-1188
Spirit Lake	(208) 623-5800
St. Maries Rural	(208) 245-5253
Timberlake	(208) 683-3333
Worley	(208) 686-1718

**Other Contacts**

United States Forest Service	(208) 765-7223
Bureau of Land Management	(208) 769-5000
Dept. of Environmental Quality	(800)-633-6247
Coeur d’Alene Tribe	(208)-686-2023
Kootenai County Solid Waste	(208) 446-1430

We live in an area which still allows its residents to burn approved yard wastes. It is up to each individual to do so in a safe manner while always being aware and courteous of neighbors and nearby occupants.

Stay safe out there!

If you have a question about emergency services in your area, please submit your question to “Ask Firefighter Jim” at [askffjim@kootenaifire.com](mailto:askffjim@kootenaifire.com). Visit our web page at [www.kootenaifire.com](http://www.kootenaifire.com) for additional information and to read archives of previously answered questions under the link, “Prevention”.