

Summer Yard Maintenance

Personal property protection by the homeowner, especially in the summer months, is vital in reducing the risk of fire in the yard. Follow these safety tips to decrease your risk of landscape fire.

Fire Facts

- In Alberta, outdoor property fires are the third most common fire in the summer. During the dry summer months, vegetation, debris and stored materials such as firewood can ignite and easily burn the landscape and even your home.

The Law

- Forest and Prairie Protection Act: Other than a campfire, any person lighting an open fire for burning debris or for any other purpose, in a fire protection area, must have a valid fire permit during the fire season (April 1 through October 31st).
- Part 2, section 2.4.5.1 (1) of the Alberta Fire Code, open-air fires shall not be set unless measures are taken to limit their spread. Measures that can be considered to limit fire spread include providing sufficient clear space between the fire and adjacent buildings, combustibles and woodlands, controlling the size and height of the pile of combustibles to be burned, and ensuring fire control measures such as hoses and water tanks are available during burning.
- Most municipalities have bylaws that define the “appropriate measures”, above, by prescribing the distances between a backyard fire pit and buildings, property lines, and combustibles materials as well as requiring proper screens such as spark arrestors. Check with your local fire department on how to comply with local bylaws.
- Your municipality may by bylaw also require a burning permit or place restrictions on open-air fires. Always check with your local Fire Chief before burning. Permits can normally be obtained from the following:
 - Your local fire chief,
 - Municipal authorities,
 - Sustainable Resource Development prevention officers.

WARNING: Adhere strictly to the conditions stated on your fire permit. If you burn without a permit or don't meet all the conditions of your fire permit – you may be liable for fire suppression costs or penalties for any damage caused by the burning.

- The Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act prohibits the burning of certain items such as household refuse, plastics and rubber products. Check with your local Fire Chief for these prohibitions where you intend to burn anything other than clean, dry firewood or charcoal.

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Recommended clearance distances for fire pits

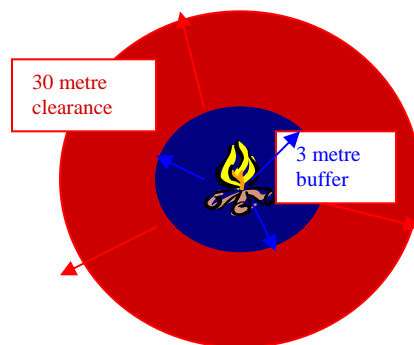
Urban home area fire pits

- fire pits should have at least 3 metres clearance, measured from the nearest fire pit edge, from buildings, property lines, or other combustible material;
- the fire pit height should not exceed 0.6 metres when measured from the surrounding grade to the top of the spark arrester screen;
- the fire pit opening should not exceed 1 metre in width or in diameter when measured between the widest points or outside edges;
- a spark arrester mesh screen with opening no larger than 1.25 cm and constructed of expanded metal (or equivalent non-combustible material) should be used to cover the fire pit opening.



Rural/forested area fire pits

- fire pits should be located over bare rock, gravel, sand, mineral soil, or concrete for a distance of at least 3 metres from the edge of the pit;
- fire pits should be located at least 30 metres from combustibles;



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Safety Tips

Yard fires

- Keep tree limbs, grass, bush, leaves, and overhanging branches away from the fire area to prevent the spread of fire.
- Have fire-fighting equipment at the fire site. Keep a rake, shovel, water and extinguisher near by and always keep a hose within reach of your fire so that you can put out those spot fires.
- Consider the prevailing wind direction and clearances from buildings and vehicles to avoid fire spread.
- Build your fire gradually, and keep it small.
- Never use gasoline or liquid fire starters to start a fire, which can cause an explosion, and avoid using paper as it can ignite and blow off the fire.
- Stop adding fuel to the fire well before you want to extinguish it and allow the fire to burn down. Spread the remains evenly in the fire pit, and slowly stir in water until the ashes are cool. Test the campfire for heat before leaving the site.
- NEVER leave children unattended or playing near a fire.
- Compost or mulch yard debris. If you must burn, check with your local fire department to obtain information about burning regulations and permits. Burn debris in a metal container with a sturdy wire-mesh cover to stop embers from escaping.
- Always supervise your fire. That way you can put out the spot fires that may occur.
- When you leave, make sure the fire is out.

Landscaping for fire safety

- Where possible, keep flammable vegetation at least 10 metres away from areas adjoining your home. Trim tree limbs so they don't hang over your roof, keep eaves and gutters free of leaves and other debris that burn easily, keep the yard area clear of garbage, debris, dry and dead grass, broken glass, oily rags or dried leaves, and store firewood away from all structures.
- Landscape your property with fire resistive plants. Young green plants are resistant, as are plants with a high moisture content, plants high in ash, and low volume shrubs. Water regularly.
- Keep porches, decks and floors enclosed or swept clean.
- Keep storage areas clean and tidy; never allow rags or newspapers to accumulate unless in an approved container.
- Before you dig into the earth to plant trees, fence posts, and make yard renovations know where your underground utility lines are located. Contact Alberta One-Call (1-800-242-3447) who will organize natural gas, electricity, water, cable, sewer, and other underground facilities to come and mark their lines on your property.

Preventing ignition sources

For more information, please contact the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at (780) 422-9000 (dial 310-000 for toll-free access outside of Edmonton) or email: aema@gov.ab.ca

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- Install spark arrestors/mufflers on all outdoor equipment with internal combustion engines.
- Clean your chimney and stovepipes and have the fire arrestor and screens inspected by a qualified technician.
- Store flammable liquids and gases such as propane and gasoline outdoors in approved safety containers away from the curious eyes of children and from potential ignition sources.
- If you use an electrical extension with your mower, be sure to use only an approved outside cable-type extension. Check the cord frequently to ensure it is not cut or frayed and replace if necessary.
- Keep overhead power lines clear of trees. Call your electrical utility to clear lines where necessary.