

# Outdoor Fire SAFETY



United States Department of  
Agriculture Forest Service, FS-465



# Outdoor Fire Safety

Anyone who has felt the warmth of a fire and enjoyed its friendly light knows that fire is not always a devastating blaze. Fire, along with air, water, and earth, was considered a basic element by our ancestors. Long ago they learned to use and control fire. It was, perhaps their first tool.

Most people are careful with fire. They build their fires in the right places and at the right time. They keep them the proper size and put them out before leaving them.

But forest fires raging out of control - wildfires - are an awesome and terrifying sight. They have aroused fear from earliest times. The damage they do is appalling, and this wasteful burning goes on year after year. The best way to keep forest fire damage low is to keep forest fires from getting started.

This pamphlet provides a few tips to help you enjoy fire safely outdoors. For more information, contact your local fire protection agency.

**Remember, Only  
YOU Can Prevent  
Forest Fires**



# Household Trash



If you must burn trash, don't pile it on the ground. It will not burn completely and will be easily blown around. Local fire officials can recommend a safe receptacle for burning trash. It should be placed in a cleared area, away from overhead branches and wires.



Never attempt to burn aerosol cans; heated cans will explode. Flying metal from an exploding can might cause an injury. Burning trash scattered by such an explosion has caused the spread of many fires.

# Debris



Check local laws on burning. Some communities allow burning only during specified hours. Others forbid it entirely.



Check the weather; don't burn on dry, windy days.



Consider the alternatives to burning. Some types of debris - such as leaves, grass, and stubble - may be of more value if used for compost. Household items such as plastics, glass, paper, and aluminum cans can be recycled or hauled to a local sanitary landfill.



If you must burn debris, do it safely.

# Agricultural Residue and Forest Litter



Be sure you are fully prepared before burning off your field or garden spot. To control the fire, you will need a source of water, a bucket, and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire.



If possible, a fire line should be plowed around the area to be burned. Large fields should be separated into small plots for burning one at a time. Be sure to stay with your fire until it is out.



Before doing any burning in a wooded area, contact your local forester. The forester will weigh all factors, explain them to you, and offer technical advice.

# Building and Putting



Build campfires away from overhanging branches, steep slopes, rotten stumps, logs, dry grass, and leaves. Pile any extra wood away from the fire.



Keep plenty of water handy and have a shovel for throwing dirt on the fire if it gets out of control.



Start with dry twigs and small sticks.



Add larger sticks as the fire builds up.

# Out a Campfire



Put the largest pieces of wood on last, pointing them toward the center of the fire, and gradually push them into the flames.



Keep the campfire small. A good bed of coals or a small fire surrounded by rocks gives plenty of heat. Scrape away litter, duff, and any burnable material within a 10-foot-diameter circle. This will keep a small campfire from spreading.



Be sure your match is out. Hold it until it is cold. Break it so that you can feel the charred portion before discarding it. Make sure it is cold out. Conserve matches - carry a candle as a fire starter.



Never leave a campfire unattended. Even a small breeze could quickly cause the fire to spread.



Drown the fire with water. Make sure the embers, coals, and sticks are wet. Move rocks - there may be burning embers underneath.



Stir the remains, add more water, and stir again. Be sure all burned material has been extinguished and cooled. If you do not have water, use dirt. Mix enough soil or sand with the embers. Continue adding and stirring until all material is cooled.



Feel all materials with your bare hand. Make sure that no roots are burning. Do not bury your coals - they can smolder and break out.

# Lanterns, Stoves, and Heaters



Cool all lanterns, stoves, and heaters before refueling. Place them on the ground in a cleared area and fill them. If fuel spills, move the appliance to a new clearing before lighting it. Recap and store flammable liquid containers in a safe place. Never light lanterns and stoves inside a tent trailer, or camper. If you use a lantern or stove inside a tent or trailer, be sure to have adequate ventilation. Always read and follow instructions provided by the manufacturer.

# Smoking



When Smoking is permitted outdoors, safe practices require at least a 3-foot clearing around the smoker. Grind out your cigarette, cigar, or pipe tobacco in the dirt. Never grind it on a stump or log. It is unsafe to smoke while walking or riding a horse or bike trail. Use your ashtray while in your car.

# Charcoal Briquets



After using the burning charcoal briquets, "dunk 'em!" Don't sprinkle. Soak the coals with lots of water; stir them and soak again. Be sure they are out - cold! Carefully feel the coals with your bare hands to be sure.

# Spark Arresters



All types of equipment and vehicles are required to have spark arresters. Chain saws, portable generators, cross country vehicles, and trail bikes - to name a few - require spark arresters if used in or near grass, brush, or a wooded area. To make sure that the spark arrester is functioning properly, check with the dealer or contact your local Forest Service or State forestry office.

Since people cause most wildfires, we all have a part in preventing them. We can be more careful ourselves. And whoever we are and wherever we are, we can influence others to use more care with fires.

**Remember, a little extra care takes only a few minutes of your time. And it could prevent a wildfire.**



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December 1990

This publication supersedes FS-335, "Safe Debris Burning", FS-336, "Fire Safety Outdoors", and FS-337, "Make Campfires Safe!"

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United States Department of Agriculture and Your State Foresters