

Recreational Fires in Washington State

Requirements for recreational fires are defined both in International Fire Code section 307 (adopted by Washington State and Spokane County) and in WAC 173-425-050 (Washington Administrative Code). The elements of these two laws essentially boil down to the following:

DEFINITION

Recreational fires are outdoor burning of charcoal or firewood (not debris or rubbish) where the fuel is not contained in an incinerator, outdoor fireplace, barbecue grill or barbecue pit¹.

Recreational fires are for pleasure, religious, ceremonial, cooking, warmth or similar purposes. Fires used for debris or rubbish disposal are not considered recreational fires and are illegal.

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance – Both WAC 173-425-050 and the International Fire Code mandate that recreational fires be constantly attended by a person capable of extinguishing the fire (alert, sober, awake) until the fire is extinguished. Extinguished is defined as all parts of the fire being out and cold. If unattended burning is reported to Fire District 9, we will extinguish it and file a fire report. Other regulatory agencies may follow up unattended burning reports with hefty fines.

Size – The International Fire Code indicate that total fuel area for the fire may not exceed 3 feet in diameter or 2 feet in height.

Tools – The International Fire Code requires that the attendant must have approved fire extinguishing equipment on hand for immediate use. Such equipment includes large portable fire extinguisher (minimum 4A rating), shovels with sand or dirt, garden hose, water truck, or water barrel with buckets.

Location – WAC 173-425-050 requires that recreational fires must be at least fifty feet away from structures. The State's building code defines fences as structures, so imperiling your neighbor's fence would violate state law. International Fire Code indicates that conditions which could cause a fire to spread within 25 feet of a structure shall be eliminated prior to ignition so make sure you have a good fuel break around the fire.

Permission - WAC 173-425-050 requires that permission from the landowner, or the owner's designated representative, must be obtained before starting a recreational fire.

Discontinuance – The Washington State Department of Ecology, Spokane County Building Official, and local Air Pollution Control Authority can all ban outdoor burning including recreational fires. If a burn ban has been issued, it may be advertised in print or TV media. Usually Spokane County considers such bans in the July through September time frames. If in doubt, contact Spokane County Division of Building at 477-3675 or Spokane County Fire District 9 at 466-4602.

Follow these rules to enjoy a safe recreational fire. For more information please contact Deputy Chief Doug Bleeker or Captain Dan Walsh of the Prevention Division, Spokane County Fire District 9 at 466-4602.

¹ A true barbecue pit is constructed to building code specifications. A fire in a hole dug in the ground does not constitute a barbecue pit under State law and would still be defined as a recreational fire.