

Open Burning Practices for Farmers and Ranchers

Farmers and ranchers sometimes face special challenges when using open burns to clear grass and stubble, debris piles and windrows. However, by using FireSmart principles, you can reduce the risk of an open burn starting a wildfire and also limit the impact of any wildfire that might threaten your property.

To help conduct your open burn safely, please follow the tips in this factsheet. Before doing any open burning, you must obtain a burn registration number (available at no charge by calling 1 888 797-1717). You must also check current weather conditions and the venting index to ensure that it's safe to burn in your area. The venting index is a measure of the atmosphere's ability to disperse airborne pollutants, such as smoke from a fire.

IMPORTANT: It is the responsibility of the individual conducting an open burn to ensure that it's done in a safe manner and in accordance with regulations and any current burning restrictions. Anyone found in contravention of an open burning prohibition may be issued a violation ticket for \$1,150, required to pay an administrative penalty of \$10,000 or, if convicted in court, fined up to \$100,000 and/or sentenced to one year in jail. If the contravention causes or contributes to a wildfire, the person responsible may be ordered to pay all firefighting and associated costs.



BURNING WINDROWS

- » Avoid building windrows in muskeg areas, where a fire can burn deep into the duff layer.
- » Avoid pushing dirt into windrows as this will smother the fire and cause it to burn continuously and produce more particulate pollution.
- » Use a brush rake or excavator to build windrows whenever possible. This helps keep dirt out of the rows and encourages better burning.
- » Pack the windrows as tightly as possible.
- » Build the windrows perpendicular to the direction of the prevailing wind.
- » Ensure that the windrows are no longer than 60 metres.
- » Ensure that ALL windrows are built no closer than 25 metres from standing timber.
- » Ensure that a fire guard of bare mineral soil (a minimum of 15 metres wide) is created around all windrows.

BURNING GRASS AND STUBBLE

- » Avoid burning grass or stubble in the heat of the day. Whenever possible, burn in the evening.
- » Never burn in windy conditions.
- » Blade or plow a fire guard (a minimum of 5 metres wide) all around your burn site, right down to the mineral soil.
- » Burn larger fields by working on smaller sections individually, with fire guards built around each section.
- » Ensure that you have adequate supervision, manpower, equipment and water nearby to control the fire (or extinguish it if necessary).
- » Never leave a burn unattended. Maintain a patrol on your fire until it is completely extinguished.

BURNING PILES

- » Whenever possible, burn piles when there is still snow cover and the ground is frozen.
- » Re-pile and re-burn if necessary until the entire pile is gone.
- » When you've finished burning the pile, check the burn site for hot spots. Hot spots may continue to smoulder (long after the surface fire appears to be out) and could flare up again in the spring.
- » Check the sites of your burn piles to ensure that they are completely extinguished. Piles can continue to burn under a layer of snow all winter long.
- » Never leave a burn unattended. Maintain a patrol on your fire until it is completely extinguished.



HAYFIELDS AND PASTURELAND

- » Reduce the amount of dry grass and stubble on your property to help prevent a fire escaping, or to help stop a wildfire spreading to your yard.
- » Turn over grain fields near buildings before the ground freezes. Making one or two passes around the yard before putting your tillage equipment away for the winter will go a long way toward making your yard FireSmart.
- » Cut hayfields next to your yard as late in the season as possible to minimize regrowth, or mow a strip around each building to create a fire guard.
- » Till around the outside perimeter of pastureland. This will create a fire break that could save a field from burning or help prevent a fire spreading to other fields.

FENCE LINES AND DITCHES

- » Manage vegetation along fence lines and ditches that lead up to buildings or other values, for at least 100 metres in all directions. This can be done by mowing these areas regularly or mowing them once late in the fall.

- » Check that all your corral lines are free of vegetation, since fire could travel along them into your fenced feed areas.

FEED STORAGE

- » Make sure that hay is cured to the proper moisture content level before baling it.
- » If possible, store straw and hay bales away from any structures to reduce the risk of a fire spreading from the bales to your house or outbuildings.
- » Maintain vegetation and keep grass mown between your bales and any buildings.
- » Store your winter supply of bales in a couple of different locations to minimize the loss of feed in the event of a fire.
- » Clean up loose hay or straw (from broken bales or bale bottoms freezing down over the winter) that may accumulate in storage areas.

GRANARIES, BARNs, OUTBUILDINGS, UNUSED LAND, OPEN AREAS AND DUGOUTS

- » Apply vegetation management strategies to granaries, barns and outbuildings to reduce wildfire threats. Livestock can also do a good job of cleaning up these areas if you are unable to mow the grass.
- » Vegetation management strategies include mowing, grazing, using handheld equipment (such as a Weed Eater) and treating areas using chemical control products (such as herbicide).

SAFETY OF LIVESTOCK

- » You should have an evacuation plan in place for your livestock in case they're ever threatened by wildfire. You should also have insurance coverage for all farm resources, including crops and livestock.
- » Prepare and maintain areas where the amount of vegetation has been reduced and where livestock can be moved in the event of a wildfire, such as a plowed or heavily grazed field (with a minimum of grass or stubble). If possible, such areas should be shaded, located well away from any forested areas and to the leeward side of your property. Water should be available in these areas.
- » If you are unable to move livestock to a safer place if a wildfire occurs, cut fences and turn the animals loose to fend for themselves, so long as doing so doesn't pose a danger to people or vehicular traffic.

MORE INFORMATION:

Obtain an open burn registration number by calling 1 888 797-1717 (toll-free). For more information on open burning bans and restrictions in B.C., visit: www.gov.bc.ca/wildfirebans

Obtain the current Ventilation Index for your area by calling 1 888 281-2992 (toll-free) or visiting: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/venting/venting.html>

BC Wildfire Service website: www.bcwildfire.ca

To report a wildfire or open burning violation, call 1 800 663-5555 toll-free or *5555 on a cellphone.

BC Wildfire Service

Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development



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