

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Fire hazard assessment and abatement

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

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What is fire hazard assessment and abatement?

- Fire hazard assessment and abatement activities are important tools to reduce potential wildfire threats arising from fuels left on the land base following industrial activities (e.g. logging) or prescribed activities.
- Section 11(1) of the Wildfire Regulation defines prescribed activities as operating a waste disposal site, a dry land sort, a camp associated with an industrial activity, or an industrial activity that is likely to create or increase a fire hazard.
- Under the *Wildfire Act*, a person carrying out an industrial activity or prescribed activity is required to assess and abate potential fire hazards related to those activities.
- **Fire hazard assessment** is the analysis of the ignition potential and predictable fire behaviour based on fuel hazards (i.e. physical fuel characteristics) and site-specific and probable weather conditions. It includes a consideration of the risk of a fire starting or spreading, the difficulty of controlling the fire, and potential impacts on identified values.
- **Fire hazard abatement** includes activities carried out to reduce ignition potential or fire behaviour by reducing the fuel hazard after an industrial activity or prescribed activity has occurred.
- **Fire hazard abatement methods** may include: physical removal of fuel from the site; chipping, mulching and/or burying (where it does not contradict other statutory and/or contractual obligations); piling and burning; and broadcast burning.

Why is it necessary to conduct fire hazard assessment and abatement activities?

- It is essential to carry out assessment and abatement activities to reduce wildfire risks — not only for harvested areas, but also for nearby interface areas, infrastructure, and other values that could be at risk.
- Fire hazard assessment is important for determining if the amount of residual fuels from prescribed and industrial activities exceed established threshold values (as defined in *A Guide to Fuel Hazard and Abatement in British Columbia* or in an alternative professionally-designed procedure, strategy, or prescription) and could lead to increased fire risk or problematic fire behaviour.
- Assessing fire hazard is a legal requirement and a critical step in demonstrating whether people conducting prescribed and industrial activities have exercised due diligence.
- Under Section 29(a) of the *Wildfire Act*, a person may not be found to have contravened the act if it can be demonstrated that he or she exercised due diligence to prevent the contravention.
- Unabated fire and fuel hazards can lead to problematic fire behaviour and pose significant challenges to wildfire control efforts.

Who can conduct wildfire hazard assessment and abatement activities?

- Conducting fire hazard assessments and developing fire hazard abatement strategies and prescriptions falls under the scope of practice of a forest professional, as defined in the *Foresters Act* and the *Association of B.C. Forest Professionals (ABCFP) Interim Guidelines – Fire and Fuel Management*. Forest professionals who conduct fire hazard assessments must be working within their scope of practice and be competent (as defined in ABCFP Bylaw 12: Standards of Professional Practice).
- An official (as defined in the *Wildfire Act*) who is operating within his or her scope of practice, as demonstrated by extensive experience and applicable training, may also carry out fire hazard assessments.

When is it necessary to complete a fire hazard assessment?

- A fire hazard assessment is required when carrying out an industrial activity such as land clearing or another prescribed activity that is likely to create or increase a fire hazard within one kilometre of forest or grassland (Section 7 of the *Wildfire Act*).
- A fire hazard assessment is also required when an official (as defined in the *Wildfire Act*) notifies a person carrying out an industrial or prescribed activity that a fire hazard exists, as outlined in Section 11(1)(b)(ii) of the Wildfire Regulation.

How often must fire hazards be assessed?

- Fire hazards must be assessed **every three months** if the activity is inside or within two kilometres of a local government area or a regional district fire protection district (Section 11(2a) of the Wildfire Regulation).
- Fire hazards must be assessed **every six months** for all other areas (Section 11(3) of the Wildfire Regulation).
- If operations are going to be inactive for more than three months in the applicable areas mentioned above or more than six months in the applicable areas also mentioned above, a fire hazard assessment must be completed upon ceasing those operations.
- A “qualified holder” may vary from these requirements to conduct fire hazard assessments at prescribed intervals specified by a forest professional (Section 11(3.1) of the Wildfire Regulation).
- A “qualified holder” is either a party to a cost-sharing agreement, or the holder of a forest licence, timber licence, tree farm licence, community forest agreement, woodlot licence or timber sale licence that has paid annual rent under the Annual Rent Regulation.

What must be included in a fire hazard assessment?

- A fire hazard assessment must include an assessment of the fuel hazard and the associated risk of a fire starting or spreading (Section 11(4) of the Wildfire Regulation).
- Fuel hazard means the potential fire behaviour, without regard to the state of weather or topography, based on the physical fuel characteristics, including fuel arrangement, fuel load, condition of herbaceous vegetation and the presence of ladder fuel (Section 1 of the Wildfire Regulation).

What is the BC Wildfire Service doing to improve hazard abatement and hazard assessment procedures throughout the province?

- The objective of provincial legislation is to ensure that fire hazards are identified and abated in an appropriate manner and within an appropriate timeframe, to help decrease potential fire behaviour and reduce the level of suppression response required if a fire starts.
- In light of the 2017 and 2018 wildfire seasons, the BC Wildfire Service commenced work with a contractor in late 2018 to gather hazard abatement and fire behaviour data throughout the province, which will help inform future updates to Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement policies, legislation, regulation and guidance. This work is expected to continue through 2020 and focuses on hazard abatement levels and associated observed or modelled fire behaviour, based on current fire science.
- The data that's gathered will help the ministry evaluate the current Fire and Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement process and address the following questions:
 1. Are current hazard abatement processes and benchmarks decreasing fire behavior on the landscape and/or in interface areas to levels required by legislation?
 2. Are Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement policies being applied consistently in British Columbia?
 3. Do current provincial policies and guidance provide adequate tools and direction to assess fuel thresholds, using current fire risk models and models under development?

RESOURCES:

Tools for assessing risk in communities

- [B.C. Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement Fire Risk Map](#)
- [B.C. Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement Fire Risk Map \(KMZ format\)](#) **Note:** To use this map, you must be able to access Google Earth on your computer.

Other resources

- In conjunction with Natural Resources Canada, the BC Wildfire Service has developed [A Guide to Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement in British Columbia](#) to help people who are carrying out industrial activities determine whether or not fuel hazard abatement is necessary, and if so, the relevant thresholds to comply with legislated obligations. This guide contains step-by-step instructions for determining when fuel hazard abatements are needed, taking into account fire risk, proximity to interface areas, fuel loading and fuel arrangement.
- For more information on hazard assessment and abatement, visit: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/for-industry-commercial-operators/hazard-assessment-abatement>

- The Association of B.C. Forest Professionals provides guidance on this topic to its members. To review the association's *Guidelines for Fire and Fuel Management*, visit: <https://abcfp.ca/web>
- Learn more about your legal obligations and responsibilities under the *Wildfire Act* and the Wildfire Regulation at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention/for-industry-commercial-operators>

Reporting

- To report a fire hazard and abatement concern or potential contravention of the *Wildfire Act* or Wildfire Regulation, visit one of the following webpages:
 - BC Wildfire Service (contacts): <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/contact-channels>
 - Natural Resource Violation reporting: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/natural-resource-law-enforcement/report-natural-resource-violations>.
- Alternatively, an individual can report concerns in person to a local BC Wildfire Service fire zone office or to the local natural resource district office.