

Burn Debris Safely

Inside: basic fire safety guidelines for outdoor debris burning.



Dallas Morning News

In 1996, an escaped trash fire near Poolville ignited a blaze that burned 16,000 acres. That fire also destroyed 141 homes and other structures--and nearly 100 vehicles.

Could a similar disaster happen today? Yes, it could. One act of carelessness could place a home, subdivision or even an entire community at risk. Residential and commercial developments spreading into previously undeveloped areas increase the likelihood that wildfires almost anywhere in the state will endanger lives, homes, businesses and natural resources.

Careless trash and debris burning ignites a tremendous number of wildfires every year in Texas, accounting for more than three-fourths of all wildfires in some regions of the state. Most people never intend to start a wildfire, but even the best of intentions can produce disastrous results when safety precautions aren't taken. Texans owe it to themselves and their neighbors to help prevent accidental wildfires from occurring.

Safe disposal of household trash, leaves and brush piles, and construction debris will eliminate a major wildfire threat. If you must burn debris, do it safely. This pamphlet provides just the basic guidelines for outdoor burning.

For more information, contact:

- > your local fire department or the
- > Texas Forest Service

Or log onto:

- > <http://txforestservicetamu.edu>
- > <http://ticc.fws.gov>

In Texas, 90% of all wildfires are human-caused; escaped debris burning is the number one cause of those wildfires.

Are you at risk?



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General Safety Tips For All Outdoor Fires

Check local laws and ordinances.

Some communities allow burning only during specified hours; others forbid it entirely. Counties may also restrict outdoor burning during periods of high or extreme fire danger.

Consider alternatives to burning.

Some types of debris, such as leaves, grass and stubble may be of more value if they are not burned. Composting can yield valuable organic matter that can be used to enrich the soil, while helping extend the useful life of landfills. Household trash such as glass and metal that can't be composted can be hauled away to a recycling center or landfill.

Don't burn outdoors during dry, windy

weather when vegetation in the vicinity is dry and fire-prone. It may only take a very small spark or burning ember to ignite dry vegetation. Winds may not only carry the burning material into surrounding vegetation but also fan the flames and spread the fire rapidly.

Before you burn trash or other debris

outdoors, contact your local fire department to let them know of your plans. You can find out if it is safe to burn outdoors and, in the event your fire should escape, firefighters will already have an idea of where the fire is located.

Stay with your fire.

Should your fire escape, you may be able to stop its spread before it becomes large enough to require additional personnel and equipment to contain it.

Safe Debris Burning



What do you have to lose?

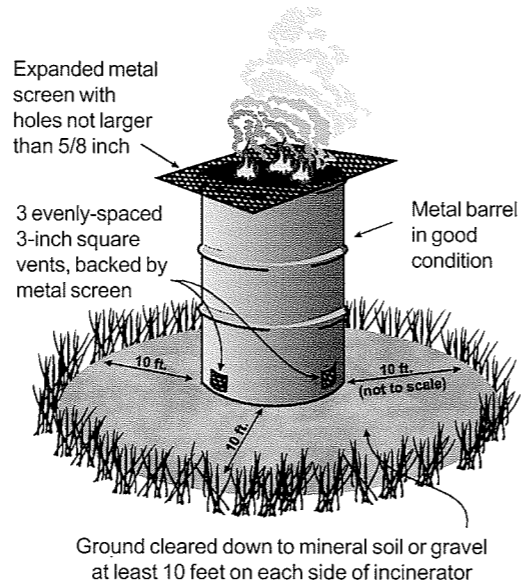


Household Trash

1 If you must burn household trash, don't pile it on the ground. It will not burn completely and will be easily blown around, increasing the danger of spreading.

2 Burn trash in a covered receptacle in a cleared area well away from overhead branches and wires. The metal grid or wire cover will help contain burning trash, and the cleared firebreak around the receptacle will further minimize the chances of a burning ember igniting a wildfire.

3 Avoid accumulating trash for several days in the burn receptacle and then igniting. Compacted trash will burn longer and less completely, thereby generating more air pollution and requiring more watching.



4 Avoid burning trash containing aerosol cans.

Heated cans will explode, and flying metal could cause an injury. The explosion may also scatter burning trash and cause a wildfire.



5 Stay with your fire.

Trash fires are more likely to escape containment and become wildfires if you aren't present to take action.

Leaves and Brush Piles

1 Consider composting or mulching. Leaves can be composted to produce organically rich soil amendments for gardens and flower beds. Branches and larger brush can be chipped and the resultant mulch used in flower beds to help hold moisture in the soil. Check for community recycling or chipping projects before opting to burn these materials.

2 Establish wide firebreaks around piles of leaves and brush to be burned. Firebreaks should be free of vegetation and wide enough to contain burning embers that may fall or roll from the pile. The larger the pile to be burned, the wider the firebreak should be with firebreak widths normally ranging from 10-30 feet on small to medium size piles.

3 Keep debris piles small, gradually adding to the fires as they burn down. Adding fuel gradually will keep fire intensity lower and lessen the chances that material will roll or be lofted over firebreaks into flammable vegetation. Large piles of burning debris generate intense heat capable of carrying relatively heavy burning embers up and away from the fire, perhaps far from the original fire.

4 Keep water and equipment handy. Have an available supply of water and hand tools such as rakes and shovels nearby in case your fire should get away. Mechanized equipment may be necessary to contain fires arising from brush pile burning, as embers may be blown farther from the fire and have more time to grow into an

uncontrollable wildfire before you can get to the spot fire. Stay with the fire until it is out cold.

5 Select burn locations away from overhanging branches and utility lines. Intense heat rising from a fire could ignite leaves and branches of trees or damage overhead lines and disrupt essential utility services.

6 Stay informed about possible weather changes. Gusty winds and changes in wind direction often accompany the passage of weather fronts. Thunderstorms may also generate strong gusts and downdrafts. Outdoor burning should be postponed when gusty winds are present or expected to occur during the time that burning would be in progress.

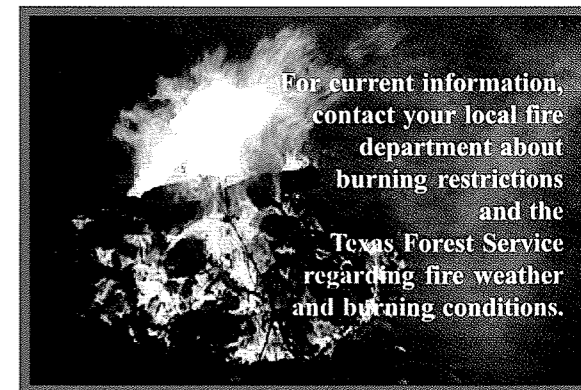
Construction Debris**

1 Recycle as much waste building and packaging material as possible. Local schools, day care facilities or community organizations might welcome materials to use for building blocks, toys and craft projects. Cardboard and many kinds of plastic can also be recycled.

2 Burn waste debris well away from vegetation and other construction materials. Create a wide firebreak around debris to be burned. Avoid burning paper or cardboard in burn piles, as heat generated by the fire may lift burning scraps up and across fire lines, particularly if any wind is present.

3 Monitor your debris fire. Keep watch on your debris fire to ensure prompt action should the fire escape containment. Burning only as much as can be consumed in one day will lessen the chances of escape.

**** Don't burn any electrical insulation, treated lumber, plastics, construction or demolition materials not made of wood, heavy oils, asphaltic materials, potentially explosive materials, chemical wastes, or items that contain natural or synthetic rubber.**



For current information, contact your local fire department about burning restrictions and the Texas Forest Service regarding fire weather and burning conditions.