

Outdoor Fire Pits

Fire pit usage is starting to increase and there has been increasing concern about fire pit safety. Here is some information that may answer questions if you want to use an approved fire pit.

Remember, always check with the local authorities if you have any questions before using any fire pit. According to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection The burning of wood in a campfire, bonfire, chiminea or other similar devices is prohibited if the burning is conducted so that it **creates a nuisance for neighbors** or it is in **violation of any restrictions imposed on such burning by your local municipality**. Special attention should include: limiting the size of such fires; setback distances from structures and/or property lines; lot size and more. Please check with your local Open Burning Official for any restrictions or requirements.

Camp/Bonfire, Fire Pit, & Chiminea or other similar devices creating complaints regarding smoke, nuisance odors, or other complaints are best directed to your Open Burning Official and/or local Fire Marshal.

Issues or concerns relating to the health effects created or experienced from burning in these types of devices should be directed to your local Open Burning Official as well as your local Health Department.

In the case of an emergency please call 911 or your local Fire Department.

Incomplete combustion that typically occurs when wood is burned in a campfire, bonfire, fire pit, chiminea or similar device can create large amounts of smoke and un-burnt particulate matter; this pollutes the air and can make it difficult for people with respiratory problems to breathe, particularly in densely populated areas.

Smoke Concerns: Excessive smoke emitted into the atmosphere at ground level can be a nuisance to your neighbors. A nuisance is considered to be the unreasonable, unwarranted, or unlawful use of one's property in a manner that substantially interferes with the use or enjoyment of another individual's real property, without an actual trespass or physical invasion to the land. Burn only clean, non-processed wood. No wood pallets, construction debris, painted wood, stained/treated wood, leaves or garbage can be burned in a campfire/bonfire, fire pit, chiminea or other similar device. Non-processed wood is considered to be any untreated, natural wood up to and including rough cut lumber. Processed wood is considered to be any wood that has been milled and/or planed and includes recycled wood, glued wood, treated wood, pallets, crates, and/or wood scraps from these types of materials.

Safety Concerns: When burning wood in a campfire/bonfire or in one of the above-mentioned devices, the utmost caution must be exercised to prevent injury to yourself or others and to prevent damage to your home or property. Some important safety precautions to take if you have a fire pit: Whether you already have a fire pit or are planning to add one, invest some effort in reviewing fire pit safety. This is especially important if you're new to using a fire pit. It only takes a second for a cozy fire to burst into a blazing inferno. Ensure you get the most enjoyment from your fire pit by keeping family and friends safe. Fire pit safety starts with selecting the right site. Make sure the ground is

level, especially when using a portable fire pit. Keep fires located at least 25 feet or more away from surrounding plants, as well as from nearby buildings, including your home.

Never operate your fire pit beneath a building overhang or in a partially enclosed space. Use special caution related to overhanging trees, which can easily ignite from flying wood-fire sparks. In fire-prone areas, surround your fire pit with non-combustible materials, like crushed stone, brick, or sand. In wood-stoked fire pits, safety begins with fuel.

Concern over what can be burned: Only burn wood that's been seasoned at least six months. Do not use construction materials, such as plywood pressure treated or composite woods, which can release toxic fumes when burned. Softwoods, like pine and birch, tend to produce more crackles and sparks than seasoned hardwoods, like oak or hickory. For wood-burning fire pits, cut logs so their length is less than three-quarters the diameter of the pit.

Never use lighter fluid or gasoline to start a fire in a fire pit. If your fire pit has a screen, use it whenever you're burning. It's also a good idea to have a bucket of water or garden hose handy to deal with wayward sparks from wood fires. Attach a hose-end multi-pattern nozzle to the hose, setting it to "spray." A shower-type spray douses a flare up, while a direct stream of water can spread sparks. Keep fire gloves nearby to handle hot parts of the fire pit safely.

Position chairs so folks can rise and move about seats without risking tumbling into the fire. Built-in seating prevents seats from being drawn too close to the flames; so do heavier chairs. Keep an eye on children whenever a fire pit is being used. Don't allow them to get too close to the blaze. Do not light a fire in windy conditions. When you're done enjoying your fire for the evening, douse it properly. Most manufactured fire pits offer specific instructions for extinguishing a fire. Review the instructions before it's time to put out your fire. Water can crack ceramic fire pits and some metal ones.

Burning of Brush

The burning of brush **always** requires a permit. There are many rules and regulations set forth by the State of Connecticut, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection that have to be followed. The burning of leaves is **not** allowed in Connecticut. Contact the outdoor burning official with any questions and to obtain a permit.

John E. Palermo
Town of Westbrook
Open Burning Official

