



# Best Practices for Open Burning

Revised 2021

## Responsibility

Any person who starts a fire is responsible for all suppression costs and possible liability from damage caused by the fire. If you do decide to burn, choose to do so under conditions that minimize health and safety risks.

From April 1 to October 31, a burn notification number is required in a provincial forest, in park land or in any quarter section wholly or partly within 4.5 km of a provincial forest. To get one, contact your local Protection Area office.

## Fire Risk Management

You should burn only under ideal conditions and with the necessary precautions in place to safely and effectively control the fire and prevent its escape.

Fires that go out of control may damage forest resources, buildings, equipment, crops, shelterbelts, powerlines or other values. Smoke from fires near roads or highways may reduce visibility and cause traffic accidents, leading to death or injury, and potential liability for the person who started the fire.

## General Considerations

Once you start a fire, make sure that you attend the fire at all times to prevent its escape.

### Wind Speed and Direction

Wind speed and direction are two of the most important factors to take into account when deciding whether to start a fire. Don't start a fire when current or forecasted wind speeds are greater than 10 km per hour. Be sure you take into account potential for wind gusts, as they can create significant problems for control. If gusts are forecasted, don't burn. If you are burning, be sure to constantly monitor the weather and, if conditions change, extinguish your fire and wait for better and safer conditions. Sometimes burns can carry on into the next day, so pay particular attention to the forecast on both the day of the burn and the day after.

Typically, winds are lightest near dawn and strongest in the afternoon. Spring and autumn usually have the strongest winds, with generally lighter winds during summer and winter.

### How to estimate wind speed

0-1 km/hour	Smoke rises vertically – no visible wind
1-5 km/hour	Smoke drifts – no visible wind
6-10 km/hour	Leaves rustle, weather vanes move, wind felt on face
11-19 km/hour	Light flags unfurl, leaves and twigs on trees move steadily
20-28 km/hour	Small branches move; loose dust and paper fly about
29-38 km/hour	Leafy shrubs and trees sway

### **Temperature and Relative Humidity**

Both temperature and relative humidity will directly affect the drying rates on vegetative fuels, especially grasses. You should not burn when the relative humidity falls below 25 per cent or when temperatures rise into the high twenties or above.

### **Thunderstorms and Cold Fronts**

Pay attention to frontal passages or thunder cells. Quite often strong, gusty winds with a different direction than the prevailing breeze precede thunderstorms, showers and weather fronts. These weather conditions can create high winds and dramatic wind shifts, which in turn, can lead to extreme fire behaviour. If these conditions exist in the weather forecast, don't burn.

### **Fire Danger Rating**

Before starting the fire, check the SPSA website at [saskpublicsafety.ca](http://saskpublicsafety.ca) for the current fire danger rating. The fire danger rating is a fire management system that evaluates and integrates the factors influencing fire danger and is usually identified in terms of low, moderate, high or extreme.

### **Time of Day**

The best time for burning is usually in the early to mid morning or late afternoon. Burning during the midday poses risks such as erratic and variable winds. Midday may also see dust devils and extremely unstable atmospheric conditions that can be dangerous and unsafe for controlled burning. If you're considering burning in the late afternoon, ensure that the burn is completed at least two hours before sunset.

### **Time of Year**

Autumn and early spring pose the most danger because vegetative fuel moisture content is normally at its lowest. This, in turn, makes the fuels much more volatile and unpredictable in how easily and actively they burn.

### **Fuel Moisture Content**

This relates directly to weather and environmental conditions. All vegetative fuel contains some moisture. When fuel moisture content gets below approximately 10 per cent, the fuel is easily ignited. Extremely dry fuels (10 per cent moisture content or less) can create extreme fire behaviour and should not be ignited.

Fuel with a moisture content greater than 25 per cent will create more smoke. At higher moisture levels, the fuel will not ignite.

### **Per Cent Cure of Fine Fuels (grass-like fuels)**

Vegetative fuels containing more than 50 per cent green/live material will normally not sustain fire or promote its spread. As fuels dry, they become much more flammable and will support sustained open flame. Fuels cured to above 90 per cent will almost completely burn, creating higher intensity fires that are more difficult to control. Extreme caution should be exercised with fuels cured more than 90 per cent.

## Fuel Types

Know what type of vegetative fuels you intend to burn. Fuels such as western snowberry and other short shrubs will burn extremely hot and fast in early spring and autumn. Fire whirls commonly form out of dense pockets of these fuel types and can carry a fire or burning embers across fuel breaks or control lines.

## Smoke Management

Smoke can cause immediate public health risks and create a hazard by impairing visibility on public roadways, rail crossings or airports. Consider what values are downwind of the proposed burn area. If you are close to other homes, communities, farmyards, roads, highways or properties, take care to ensure that smoke from the fire does not harm those downwind.

Winds of 6 to 11 km/hour will disperse smoke. Where smoke is a concern, don't light fires at night or early evening. Nighttime inversions may occur with warmer air aloft settling over cooler air at the surface. In these conditions smoke will pool in low-lying areas and be trapped close to the ground.

## Other Considerations

- Always pay careful attention to the fire, as fires can change in size and intensity very quickly.
- Be careful not to burn too much fuel or area at one time and use extreme caution and due diligence when burning.
- If you start fires late in the fall or winter, check them in the spring. They may have “gone to ground” and hot dry winds in spring could flare them up.
- Ensure the fire does not exceed your fire fighting capacity.
- Start lighting the fire on the downwind side of the proposed burn area up against the fuel break or control line.

## Other Measures That Can Be Taken

### Fuel Breaks

Construct a fuel break around the area you intend to burn. Fuel breaks should be a minimum of 10 metres wide for larger burns.

In fields where commercial grains are grown, you can construct a fuel break by tilling and turning over soil to a 10-metre width around the entire proposed burn area. On grasslands, construct a 10-metre fuel break by first mowing the fuel break as short as possible and then either using water (spray booms) to wet the fuel break down or by applying fire fighting foam over the fuel break.

There are other considerations for fuel breaks. Keep these breaks well away from steep slopes, ravines and coulees. Keep the fuel break as straight as possible and avoid sharp corners or right angle turns. Placing fuel breaks in this manner will allow good access around the entire perimeter of the fire for control purposes, and avoid any heavy fuel pockets which could cause spot fires or a high intensity section of the fire to breach the fuel break.

**Outdoor Fireplace or Fire Pit**

These should be constructed on mineral soil or contained in a non-combustible receptacle, located a minimum of one metre from any combustible materials, at least three metres from any overhanging vegetation and should not be used to burn rubbish, manure or domestic waste.

**Burn Barrel or Other Incinerator**

Burn only woody debris and yard waste (leaves and branches). Items like plastic, cardboard, garbage, chemicals, organic waste or wood that includes paint, glue or other chemicals emit toxic smoke and must not be burned. Take steps to prevent your fire from escaping:

- (a) Use a fully enclosed device in good working condition made of non-combustible material and covered with a heavy gauge metal screen (mesh size of 7-16 mm) to prevent the escape of sparks;
- (b) Locate over bare rock, gravel, sand, mineral soil or concrete to a distance of at least one metre from its base;
- (c) Locate at least 15 metres from any standing timber, slash or other combustible material; and
- (d) Make certain a sufficient supply of water (at least 100 litres) or a charged water hose is on hand.

# Contact Information

## Eastern Response Centre Area

Hudson Bay .....	306-865-4500
Lower Fishing Lake .....	306-426-2600
Prince Albert .....	306-953-3422
Weyakwing .....	306-664-5620

## Northern Response Centre Area

Denare Beach .....	306-362-5676
La Ronge .....	306-425-4446
Stony Rapids .....	306-833-3220

## Western Response Centre Area

Buffalo Narrows .....	306-235-1800
Dorintosh .....	306-236-7696
Ile a la Crosse .....	306-833-3220

## Southern Response Centre Area

Cypress Hills .....	306-662-5400
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The information contained in this brochure is not legal advice. For more information or clarification on burning requirements contact your nearest Protection Area Office or go to [saskpublicsafety.ca](http://saskpublicsafety.ca)

To report an incident, call 9-1-1. To request SPSA assistance call 1-800-667-9660.

When planning an open burn, contact your local Rural Municipality office to ensure that there are no by-laws in place concerning open fires.

After you obtain your Burn Notification Number, we recommend calling your local Protection Area Office to let them know of your burn plan. This will help avoid unnecessary dispatch of volunteer fire departments or unnecessary costs.

### Be Aware of the Danger

Over 50 per cent of Saskatchewan's fires are caused by people. Many of these fires occur when residents attempt to use fire for constructive purposes but underestimate the burning conditions.

### Be Aware of the Danger

Environment Canada broadcasts weather 24 hours a day on the following FM frequencies 162.400, 162.475 and 162.550. If you do not have an FM radio you can visit Environment Canada's website for current weather information.