

The Air District regulates open burning through a combination of the California Health & Safety Code, [Section 41800](#) et seq, [Title 17](#) of the California Code of Regulations, [Regulation III](#) of the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District and various local ordinances.

The District encourages people to find alternatives to open burning for vegetation disposal. Chipping, composting, hauling and curbside green waste pickup (such as through Waste Management at 274-3090 in western Nevada County) are all popular alternatives. Nonetheless, the Air District understands that open burning is the most cost-effective, time-efficient and resource-protective way for many people in Nevada, Sierra and Plumas County to dispose of unwanted brush and limbs. For information on the Nevada County chipping program, call the Fire Safe Council at 272-1122. Visit our [Alternatives to Open Burning](#) page for more clean air options to open burning.

Residential Open Burning: Residential open burning is strictly that burning conducted at a single or two family residence for routine residential maintenance. The rules vary with the time of year and your fire district. In general, here is what you need to know ([view our Residential Vegetation Management flyer](#)):

- You must always call the appropriate [burn day number](#) to see if it is a burn day.
- Burn only natural vegetation – no plywood, no OSB, no painted or treated wood, no plastic, no paper or cardboard, no waste oil, no clothing, no insulation, no carpet, no diapers, no garbage. An exception to this is that a small amount of newspaper, lighter fluid or gas/diesel blend may be used (carefully) for ignition.*
- You are not allowed to create a smoke nuisance for anyone (and could be cited if you do).
- Material may not be transported from one property to another for the purpose of disposing of it through open burning.
- It is illegal to burn in a barrel or anything that functions as a burn barrel.**
- Your burn pile cannot exceed 4 ft. by 4 ft. when residential burn permits are required.
- If you live within any city limit, then you may need a burn permit from the local fire department. In Nevada City, a burn permit is always required, and burning is not allowed in the City of Grass Valley. Otherwise, the burn day number for your area will tell you if burn permits are required. Local fire agencies typically require burn permits when fire danger warrants special precautions, such as in the late spring and early fall.
- If you intend to do any burning whatsoever beyond a pile of brush and limbs resulting from routine residential maintenance, then you will probably need an Air Pollution Permit and need to contact the [Air District](#) for clear direction.

Unfortunately, it can be far more complicated than what we have told you here. To be absolutely sure, please don't hesitate to [call the Air District](#).

Prescribed Fire or Project Burns: All burning that is not "Residential" burning requires an Air Pollution permit from the Air District. The types of burns that require an [Air Pollution permit](#) can be:

- [Forest Management](#) - includes, but is not limited to, timber harvest slash burning and prescribed fire. Burns greater than 10 acres in size require a [Smoke Management Plan](#).
- [Land Clearing for Development](#) - includes, but is not limited to, any burning done on any property being developed for commercial or residential use.
- [Agricultural](#) - includes, but is not limited to, burning of crop residue, prunings or brush in preparation of crop planting.
- [Range Improvement](#) - includes, but is not limited to, any burning done to improve graze of management of a livestock operation.
- [Ditch, Road and Right-of-Way Maintenance](#) - includes, but is not limited to, fires used by a public agency or utility to maintain levees, ditches, reservoirs, roadways and the like.
- [Hazard Reduction](#) - includes, but is not limited to, burning of vegetation in compliance with State

or local law or ordinance to reduce a fire hazard.

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Tips on Burning: Where there's fire, there's smoke. However, smoke can be a serious health threat - especially to children, the elderly and people with heart or lung impairment. Keep a close eye on your smoke to gauge the success of your burn. In addition to conforming to the above requirements, burn piles must (by regulation) be managed in such a way that smoke production is minimized. Here are some tips based on years of experience.

- Construct piles loosely, with spaces to allow adequate oxygen to reach the burning material.
- Construct piles intelligently, in a dome or teepee shape that allows heat to build so that flames can be maintained and the vegetation can be consumed rapidly. Flat, sprawling piles rarely burn well.
- Try to burn when a storm is approaching (and the air pressure is dropping); smoke dispersion is usually pretty good then. In general, low air pressure equates to better smoke dispersion. Observe wood stove smoke in your area to get an idea of how your smoke is likely to behave.
- Do not attempt to burn large stumps in a residential area, and avoid burning punky logs that are well on their way to enriching the soil.
- Check berry vines for excessive moisture by breaking a thick cane and squeezing the pith -- many people have accidentally offended their neighbors by burning wet berry vines that were dry on the outside.
- Make sure your pile is clean (another regulatory requirement); an archenemy of a good burn pile is dirt, which concentrates as the vegetation burns away, reducing airflow.
- Create a "heart" of fine, flammable vegetation such as dry scotch broom and light it down low on the side the wind is coming from.
- Use a hat (as a fan), leaf blower or tractor fan to force air into the pile as needed.
- Don't burn all the small branches first. Pace the addition of small stuff to maintain flames as needed. Likewise, be aware of how well various plants burn -- manzanita, buckbrush and broom can be gradually added to keep less flammable plants such as hardwoods and ornamentals burning well. English laurel is especially notorious for burning poorly and creating irritating smoke.
- Try to avoid burning poison oak. While medical opinions vary, extensive anecdotal evidence indicates that the smoke can cause an allergic reaction.
- Wear gloves and keep tools on hand to manipulate branches and fluff the pile up as needed, and turn protruding, smoking branches in to the flames (you can shield the heat from your face with a shovel or a leather hat if necessary, and don't wear loose, flammable clothing such as an unbuttoned overshirt).
- Arrange slightly damp leaves and brush around the active pile to dry them before adding them to the pile.
- If you have a large pile or multiple piles, light a small test fire first, to make sure the smoke goes up and away from neighbors.
- Stay with your pile and make sure it burns hot and clean. When it has burned down to coals, put it out with water if possible instead of letting it smolder all night (extinguished coals can be good for a garden).
- If your fire is not going well, or smoke is blowing toward a neighbor's house, it is perfectly honorable and neighborly to put it out and wait for another day.

Exemption to Burn on a No Burn Day - If you think you qualify for an exemption to burn on a No Burn Day (non-residential only), then download the [No Burn Day Authorization form](#), fill it out and submit it to the Air District along with the appropriate fee after reading our [Policy and Procedure for Issuing Authorizations to Burn on a No-Burn Day](#). If you are still unsure or have any questions after reviewing our policy, please do not hesitate to [call the Air District](#).

You may also fillout a [No Burn Day Authorization form](#) online, print it out and fax it to the Air District at (530) 274-7546 if you are in a hurry.

[Why Do We Have No Burn Days?](#)

[Burn Day Statistics by Day of the Week](#)

[Fee Schedule for Air Pollution Permits for Open Burning](#)

[Sample Air Pollution Permit for Open Burning Projects](#) (This is only a sample permit. Do not fill it in and send it to us with your payment. It is available to you so that you will know what information we need from you. You must talk to an Air District employee before you can obtain a legal Air Pollution Permit.)

* Remote Area Exemption to Paper and Cardboard Burning Prohibition: In some remote parts of Sierra and Plumas County, paper and cardboard may be burned for disposal. Paper and cardboard may NOT be burned in the following Zip Codes.

Nevada County: All. It is illegal to burn paper or cardboard in Nevada County.

Sierra County: 95944, 95960, 96124 and the City of Loyalton.

Plumas County: 95934, 95947, 95956, 95971, 95981, 96020, 96103, 96106, 96122 and 96137.

** Remote Area Exemption to Burn Barrel Ban: The use of burn barrels was banned by the State several years ago except in a few very remote areas. Barrels may NOT be used in the following Zip Codes.

Nevada County: 96161, 95715 and all Zip Codes beginning with 959.

Sierra County: 89439, 95922, 95936, 95944, 95960, 96118, 96124, 96125 and 96126.

Plumas County: 95934, 95947, 95956, 95971, 95981, 95983, 95984, 96020, 96103, 96106, 96118, 96122 and 96137.