

Prevent your campfire from turning into a wildfire

May 26, 2022



Sitting around a campfire is one of the special times we all enjoy, but campfires are also a major cause of wildfires. May is Wildfire Awareness Month, and the Pacific Northwest Coordination Group urges campers to follow these basic outdoor safety tips:

- **Know before you go**

Before going camping, always contact the forest district, agency or landowner first to learn if there are any current campfire restrictions where you plan to recreate.

- **Have water and fire tools on site**

Keep a shovel and a bucket of water nearby to extinguish any escaped embers. When you are ready to leave, drown all embers with water, stir the coals, and drown again. Repeat until the fire is DEAD out. If it is too hot to touch, it is too hot to leave.

- **Select the right spot**

Where campfires are allowed, choose a site with an existing ring. Fire pits in established campgrounds are the best spots. If you choose to build a campfire, avoid building it near your tent, structures, vehicles, shrubs or trees, and be aware of low-hanging branches overhead. Clear the site down to bare soil, at least five feet on all sides, and circle it with rocks. Store unused firewood a good distance from the fire.

- **Keep your campfire small**

A campfire is less likely to escape control if it is kept small. A large fire may cast hot embers long distances. Add firewood in small amounts as existing material is consumed.

- **Attend your campfire at all times**

A campfire left unattended for even a few minutes can grow into a costly, damaging wildfire. Stay with your campfire from start to finish until it is dead out, as required by law. That ensures any escaped sparks or embers can be extinguished quickly.

- **Consider alternatives to a campfire this summer**

- Portable gas camp stoves are a safer option to wood-fueled campfires at any time of year. Areas that prohibit campfires outside maintained campgrounds with established fire pits often allow camp stoves that use liquified, bottled fuels. For propane fire rings, follow the same safety precautions you would with a log-based campfire. The use of propane fire rings may vary statewide, depending on local conditions.

- **Never use gasoline or other accelerants**

Don't use flammable or combustible liquids, such as gasoline, propane or lighter fluid, to start or increase your campfire.

- **Burn ONLY local wood**

Hauling your firewood to a remote campground can potentially transport invasive species. Instead, buy it where you'll burn it or gather wood on site where permitted. State regulations prohibit the open burning of any other material that creates dense, toxic smoke or noxious odors. Burning paper and cardboard can also easily fly up to start new fires.

- Beach campfires should be on open sand and away from driftwood or vegetation. Slowly pour water on your beach fire to put it out. Don't pour the water too quickly because hot sand can fly up and hit anyone nearby. Also, don't use sand to put out a beach fire. Covering the fire with sand will insulate the coals, keeping them hot enough to burn someone hours or even days later.

Escaped campfires can be costly. State and federal law require the proper clearing, building, attending and extinguishing of open fires at any time of year. While citations and fines may apply, the biggest potential cost for an escaped campfire is firefighting costs. These can range from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars or more.

Visit these agencies for campfire and beach fire updates throughout the summer: OPRD at stateparks.oregon.gov ODF at <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/pages/restrictions.aspx> USFS at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r6> BLM at <https://blm.gov/orwafire> DNR at www.dnr.wa.gov/OutdoorBurning

During Wildfire Awareness Month visit Smokey Bear's website at <https://www.smokeybear.com/en> and www.keeporegongreen.org for other wildfire prevention tips.

The Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group is established to provide a coordinated interagency approach to wildfire management in Oregon and Washington. PNWCG provides leadership in interface and wildland fire management for local, tribal, state and federal agencies and their constituents to enhance firefighter safety and protection of life, property, and natural resources.

PNWCG is comprised of USDA-Forest Service; USDI-Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service; Oregon Department of Forestry; Washington Department of Natural Resources; Washington Association of Fire Chiefs; The Oregon Fire Chiefs Association; The Oregon State Fire Marshal and the Washington State Fire Marshal.