

# STAY HOME. SAVE LIVES.



## ***Frequently asked questions about the voluntary ask to refrain from outdoor burning Final April 3, 2020***

### ***1. What exactly are Oregonians being asked to do?***

Oregonians are being asked to voluntarily refrain from outdoor burning if possible until further notice. This will help communities coping with the impact of COVID-19 in several ways.

- While some people with COVID-19 are hospitalized, most patients recover at home, where smoke from a nearby open burn could worsen their condition.
- Exposure to smoke can increase the risk of contracting infectious respiratory disease, such as COVID-19, increase the severity of existing respiratory infections, and worsen underlying chronic respiratory conditions.
- Smoke may cause symptoms in some people that may cause them to seek medical care at a time when health resources are stretched.
- There is a severe shortage of personal protective equipment to reduce smoke exposure at this time.
- Outdoor burning can escape at a time when emergency services are operating at a reduced capacity and have limited resources to respond to out-of-control burns.

### ***2. What is considered outdoor burning?***

Any fire that is set in the open air and produces smoke. Open burning activities include backyard burning, burn barrels, industrial burning, slash and forest burning, agricultural burning, and recreational campfires.

### ***3. What is backyard burning?***

A common form of backyard burning, is the burning of yard debris around people's property. Escaped fires from the burning of yard debris are the number one cause of wildfires in Oregon, responsible for starting an average of 173 fires per year on lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Backyard burning also includes backyard fire pits and similar burn activities.

### ***4. Is this a voluntary request to not burn outdoors or is it a ban on outdoor burning?***

The state is asking that considering the COVID-19 situation that people voluntarily refrain from open burning if possible. Local officials may place local bans on open burning for a variety of reasons (such as elevated local fire danger or poor air quality) so check with your local authorities (e.g. fire department, ODF) to see if outdoor burning is allowed in your area.

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## **5. *Can Oregonians still cook outside?***

Yes. Barbecue equipment, including propane and charcoal grills, are allowed, but are still subject to existing local laws and regulations.

## **6. *Does this request apply statewide?***

Yes. So far, more than two-thirds of Oregon counties have reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 and more may do so in coming days. So, we're asking all Oregonians to consider refraining from outdoor burning during this health emergency.

## **7. *How long will this voluntary curtailment on burning be in place?***

Until such time as the impact of COVID-19 eases and smoke from outdoor burning will not create an undue burden on our neighbors, our health system and emergency services.

## **8. *What if I decide I must burn?***

If you feel burning is essential and can't be postponed, then after checking with local officials to see if outdoor burning is allowed in your local area, you may proceed to burn. Please be sure to follow best burn practices to avoid unnecessary smoke impacts or escaped fires. That includes following these simple steps:

- Place yard debris in an open area well away from structures, trees and power lines (exact distance is based on type and size of burn you're conducting, so it's advisable to check with local authorities)
- Create small piles (4' x 4') to better manage the burn.
- Cover portions of piles with polyethylene plastic (landscape material) to keep a portion dry for lighting later.
- When conditions improve, check with your local fire agency for any regulations in place.
- Never burn under windy conditions.
- To maintain containment, create a perimeter around the pile at a minimum of 3 feet, scraped clear to bare mineral soil.
- Keep a shovel and charged hose nearby to manage the burn.
- Make sure the pile is dead out before leaving.
- Return periodically over several weeks to make sure the pile is still out: No heat, no smoke.

More information on safe debris burning can be found [here](#) or on the website of the Office of the State Fire Marshall [here](#).

## **9. *If I want to clear brush from around my home to create defensible space what do I do with all the debris if I can't burn it?***

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We are still encouraging people in areas where wildfire is a risk to clear defensible space around their home and other structures. If you do, there are several options for disposing of the resulting yard debris.

1. Chip or use some other method to reduce size and compost it
2. Haul it away to a yard waste composting/recycling center
3. Pile it well away from structures and burn it later next fall or winter.
  - a. Cover part of the pile with polyethylene plastic (landscape material) to keep a portion dry for lighting later.

NOTE: If covered, your pile may burn cleaner and more completely with less smoke.
  - b. When conditions improve, check with your local fire agency for any regulations in place.

**10. *People near me are farmers/ranchers/orchardists and I see them still burning. Should they be told to stop?***

This is a voluntary request. Some cases of agricultural burning can't be postponed because it's essential for raising food or crops.

**11. *What about prescribed burns in forests? Are they a good idea at this time?***

This is a voluntary request. Prescribed burning is an important land management tool to reduce risk of wildfire and restores forest health by eliminating excessive forest fuels. Prescribed burners are regulated in Oregon to burn during times when weather conditions are optimal, and smoke can be directed away from communities. However, delaying prescribed burning from spring to fall will reduce smoke in the coming weeks, when COVID-19 infections are expected to peak in Oregon.

**12. *Under what circumstances might open burning be prohibited?***

At present, fire chiefs and certain state agencies have authority to prohibit or delay outdoor burning in local areas based on weather and air quality conditions in order to minimize smoke impacts to people. During the COVID-19 pandemic, smoke could worsen health risks to vulnerable people and increase infection risks, overburdening limited local health care systems. In that case, the state may need to act on the local level to reduce risk of smoke exposure from outdoor burning based on local coronavirus infection rates and health care system capacity, as well as wildfire risk.

**13. *Where can I get more information?***

For more information on burning across Oregon please, visit:

<https://www.oregon.gov/odf/Fire/pages/Burn.aspx>

<https://www.oregon.gov/deq/aq/Pages/Burning.aspx>

<https://www.oregon.gov/ODA/programs/NaturalResources/Pages/Burning.aspx>

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For the latest COVID-19 response and protocols information please visit:

<https://govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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