



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Burn ban issued for 32 Western North Carolina counties due to hazardous forest fire conditions

RALEIGH – Due to increased fire risk, the N.C. Forest Service has issued a ban on all open burning and has canceled all burning permits for the following counties in western North Carolina: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Cabarrus, Caldwell, Catawba, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mecklenburg, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Union, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

The burning ban goes into effect at 5 p.m. Friday, April 3, 2020, and will remain in effect until further notice.

“With spring wildfire season on us, coupled with the COVID-19 crisis, we don’t need to take any unnecessary chances with the dry weather and fuel conditions that will exist in the western part of our state during the next several days,” said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. “Until we see more greening in western North Carolina, these hazardous forest fire conditions will continue. This open burning ban is a necessary step to protect lives and property.”

Under North Carolina law, the ban prohibits all open burning in the affected counties, regardless of whether a permit was previously issued. The issuance of any new permits has also been suspended until the ban is lifted. Anyone violating the burn ban faces a \$100 fine plus \$180 court costs. Any person responsible for setting a fire may be liable for reimbursing the N.C. Forest Service for any expenses related to extinguishing the fire.

Local fire departments and law enforcement officers are assisting the N.C. Forest Service in enforcing the burn ban.

Answers to frequently asked questions

Q: What is open burning?

A: Open burning includes burning leaves, branches or other plant material. In all cases, burning trash, lumber, tires, newspapers, plastics or other nonvegetative material is illegal.

Q: May I still use my grill or barbecue?

A: Yes, if no other local ordinances prohibit their use.

Q: How should I report a wildfire?

A: Call 911 to report a wildfire.

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Q: How should I report a person who intentionally starts a wildfire?

A: Call 911 to report a wildfire.

Q: My local fire marshal has also issued a burn ban for my county. What does this mean?

A: The burn ban issued by the N.C. Forest Service does not apply to a fire within 100 feet of an occupied dwelling. Local government agencies have jurisdiction over open burning within 100 feet of an occupied dwelling. The N.C. Forest Service has advised county fire marshals of the burning ban and has asked for their consideration of also implementing a burning ban. If a fire within a 100-foot area of a dwelling escapes containment, a North Carolina forest ranger may take reasonable steps to extinguish or control it. The person responsible for setting the fire may be liable for reimbursing the N.C. Forest Service for any expenses related to extinguishing the fire.

Q: Are there other instances which impact open burning?

A: Local ordinances and air quality regulations may impact open burning. For instance, outdoor burning is prohibited in areas covered by Code Orange or Code Red air quality forecasts. Learn more about air quality forecasts at: <https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/air-quality-outreach-education/air-quality-forecasts>

Q: Can I have a campfire when I go camping?

A: Campfires would be considered open burning and are not exempt from the burn ban. Portable gas stoves or grills are alternate methods for cooking food while camping during a burn ban.

Q: What can I do to protect my house against the risk of wildfire?

A: Learn about wildfire risk assessments and preparedness and prevention plans on the N.C. Forest Service website at https://www.ncforestservice.gov/fire_control/fc_wui.htm.

The N.C. Forest Service will continue to monitor conditions. Residents with questions regarding their specific county can contact their county ranger with the N.C. Forest Service or their county fire marshal's office.