



In this Issue:

Categories of Open Fires

Jurisdiction

Enforcements, Tickets and Charges

What To Report and Where To Report It

You should understand the different categories of open fires before you burn.

You should also know your obligations and check with your local jurisdiction before lighting any fire!

CAMPFIRES

A campfire is not simply a fire used for recreational or ceremonial purposes. In order to be considered a campfire under the *Wildfire Act*, a campfire cannot be larger than 0.5 by 0.5 metres in size. While campfires are the smallest of the open fires, they can still easily spark a wildfire if not used properly, given the right conditions. Each year, wildfires are started because people leave their campfires unattended or do not extinguish them properly. Before leaving the area for any length of time, campfires must be completely extinguished and cool to the touch.

More information about campfires and cooking stoves:

[Campfire regulations poster](#)

[Campfires and stoves pamphlet](#)

CATEGORY 2 OPEN FIRES

Many people engage in “backyard burns” in the spring or fall as part of their yard clean up. This type of burning by homeowners usually falls within the “Category 2” classification in the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*.

- Category 2 fires are fires that:
- burn material in one pile not exceeding 2 metres in height and 3 metres in width; or,
 - burns material concurrently in two piles each not exceeding 2 metres in height and 3 metres in width;
 - or burns stubble or grass over an area that does not exceed 0.2 hectares (less than 2,000 square metres.)

This size of fire does not require registration or notification prior to lighting the fire but it does require monitoring and you should only light a fire if you feel confident that you have the means to put it out quickly should the need arise.



Are you in a position to teach children about campfire safety? A good place to start is the book *Contain the Flame* by Jill Urban Donahue for children ages 3-6.

Categories of open fires continued

CATEGORY 3 OPEN FIRES

Anything larger than a Category 2 fire that is not a Resource Management fire is a Category 3 fire. These fires are often “land clearing” piles and are often piled by machines.

If these fires are within BC Wildfire Service jurisdiction, they must be registered by phoning 1-888-797-1717. They must abide by BC Wildfire Service prohibitions and the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*.

Should the fire escape, the people on site must attempt fire control if possible, and report the fire, the same as for any other fire escape. However, they must continue fire control until relieved by an official. They also must make more resources available to fight the fire: two pieces of heavy equipment, two fire suppression systems, and eleven workers each equipped with at least one fire fighting hand tool. They must also make available all workers, fire suppression systems, heavy equipment and fire fighting tools within 30 km by road if on Crown land, or all resources working on the land if the land is other than Crown land.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT FIRES

Resource management fires are fires conducted by the government, First Nations, private industries and other organizations for a number of reasons including:

- to create fuel breaks in both the wildland-urban interface and the landscape
- to reduce understory fuels and restore fire-maintained ecosystems
- to improve wildlife habitat and domestic range
- to achieve reforestation objectives

When a company or an individual conducts a Resource Management Burn, there is an obligation to produce a burn plan and adhere to it. This plan includes size, fuels, objectives and a plan for suppression in the event of an escape.

The *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation* are very specific in what is expected from anyone planning to conduct an Industrial or Resource Management Burn. For more information go to:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/prevention/prescribed-burning/planning-a-burn>

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO CHECK THE VENTING INDEX?

Anyone who lights, fuels or makes use of a Category 2 or 3 open fire must comply with the Environmental Management Act and Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation (OBSCR). This requires anyone using a Category 2 or 3 open fire to check venting conditions prior to lighting up by going to: <http://www.bcairquality.ca/readings/ventilation-index.html> or by calling 1-888-281-2992. Do not start your burn when conditions are “Poor” or “Fair.” Go to page 6 for more on the venting index.

Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction is an important issue in how and where the BC Wildfire Service responds to wildfires and in how and where prohibitions apply. If you are trying to determine whether you can go ahead and light a fire, you must find out if the location you intend to light it in has a local burn bylaw. If it is within an area governed by a local government or regional district which has a bylaw in place, their rules take precedent over any prohibition the BC Wildfire Service institutes.

The *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation* was legislated to provide wildfire protection primarily for Crown land. It was never intended to cover subdivisions or communities. For that reason, the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation* is the “default” if there are not local government open fire bylaws in place and our prohibitions take effect.

A good first step to determining if there are burn bylaws in place if you intend to light the fire on your own property is to confirm which local

government you pay your taxes to, but this may not always give you the full story. In some cases, your land may be in one jurisdiction but the bylaws that determine whether or not you can conduct an open burn are dictated by a local fire department’s operating boundaries or its area of responsibility. Make sure you are very clear about which local government jurisdiction and which fire department jurisdiction you fall into-it may take a few phone calls and some patience.

If you are not at home, checking with a local visitor information centre or confirming regulations with the campground or resort operator you’re staying at is a good way to find out about bylaws. www.bcwildfire.ca and local fire centre Information Officers can also help you determine where BC Wildfire Service prohibitions are in place if you are unsure.

JURISDICTION WHEN IT COMES TO FIRE RESPONSE

It shouldn’t be assumed that every wildfire in the province is burning on Crown land or falls within the BC Wildfire Service’s jurisdiction. Much like local burn bylaws take precedence over BC Wildfire Service prohibitions where they exist, the lead on fire response is the municipal fire department within their operating boundaries. A wildfire that doesn’t involve any structures could be burning within the boundaries of a municipality that has its own fire department capable of responding to it. In cases where a fire department has jurisdiction, the BC Wildfire Service may still attend the fire and provide assistance if requested. In fire centres such as the Coastal Fire Centre, with a high population density comes many municipal fire departments that have jurisdiction over fire response. In fact, one of the first things a BC Wildfire Service dispatcher does when learning of a new fire is determine whose jurisdiction the fire is in so that it is clear which agency will be taking the lead on fire response.

Enforcements, Tickets and Charges

Every year, firefighting resources and money are spent on suppressing human-caused fires that are completely preventable. One of the methods used to discourage people from taking part in illegal activities that could start or contribute to a wildfire is to issue fines, charges and/or penalties to those who do not comply with the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*.

The *Wildfire Act* and *Wildfire Regulation* define the legal responsibilities and obligations to which everyone in British Columbia is subject. It's also the piece of legislation that grants officials the authority to place bans and restrictions on an area and makes the bans and restrictions enforceable. The *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation's* key goal is to specify responsibilities and obligations on fire use, wildfire prevention, wildfire control and rehabilitation.

Conservation Officers, Compliance and Enforcement Officers and RCMP Officers have the authority to issue violation tickets under the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*. These officers have several options when they find someone in violation of the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*. Depending on the severity of the offense, the officer could choose to deliver a verbal warning,

issue a warning ticket or issue a violation ticket. Fire wardens play an important role in wildfire prevention and education in some fire centres around the province, including in the Coastal Fire Centre, but they do not have the authority to issue violation tickets or orders.

A summary of fines for violations of the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation* can be found by going to gov.bc.ca/wildfirefines. A variety of the fines increased on April 1, 2016 and B.C. now has some of the highest wildfire-related violation ticket fines in Canada.

In serious cases, such as when an individual is alleged to have intentionally set a fire and the fire has caused damages, the province may choose to lodge a case against the individual and take them to provincial court on behalf of the people of British Columbia. Depending on the outcome of the case and nature of the offense, the individual may be ordered to pay for all associated wildfire costs and damages and even face time in prison. If a person's action resulted in a fire, it is also possible to issue the violator an administrative penalty. The penalty could be the full cost to put out the fire, plus damages, due to the person's failure to follow the *Wildfire Act* and *Regulation*.

Below are a few examples of *Wildfire Act* fines:

- Section 2: Failure to report fire \$383
- Section 5 (1): Light, fuel or use a fire against regulations
- Section 13 (2): Fail to comply with order to leave area
- Section 16 (2): Fail to comply with fire control order

What To Report and Where To Report It

The BC Wildfire Service has several methods to detect new wildfires, including aerial patrols, but we count on the public and people working in forested areas to report wildfires when they see them.

If you see a fire that you are confident is a wildfire or an unattended campfire, call the wildfire reporting line at 1 800 663-5555 or *5555 on a cell phone. The BC Wildfire Service 1 800 Centre employee who takes your call will ask you a series of questions to get as much information about the fire as possible. The more you know about factors such as where the fire is located, how big it is and whether you know of structures or other values nearby, the better.

We also rely on the public to report open burning that they believe is in violation of open burning regulations or prohibitions. Sometimes it is most appropriate to report open burning violations to the wildfire reporting line, but sometimes it is most appropriate to report them to the RAPP hotline. RAPP stands for Report All Poachers and Polluters and it is used to report fisheries, wildlife and environmental protection violations to the Conservation Officer Service. Conservation Officers can enforce prohibitions in effect under *Wildfire Act* and *Regulations*. Depending on the nature of the alleged open burning violation, they could also refer the report to Natural Resource Officers in FLNRORD's Compliance and Enforcement Branch for follow up.

It can be difficult to know whether to report an open burning violation to the wildfire reporting line or to the RAPP hotline because each case is unique. When it comes down to it, this decision is a judgement the individual reporting the fire must make for themselves

Some considerations to think about when deciding where to report a fire you believe is in violation of an open burning regulation or prohibition are:

- Are you sure it's an open burning violation? Can you see the actual fire or do you just see a plume of smoke in an area you think open burning might be taking place?
- Is anyone attending the fire?
- Do you think the open burn has the potential to cause a wildfire in the near future?
- Do you know what is burning? Is someone burning woody debris or are they burning substances prohibited under the *Environmental Management Act* such as drywall, treated or painted wood or hazardous waste?

Considering these questions can help you determine whether the BC Wildfire Service or an enforcement agency such as the Conservation Officer Service or Compliance and Enforcement Branch should be the agency that receives the initial report of the alleged open burning violation. The open burning violation should be reported to the RAPP hotline when there are smoke pollution concerns or when there are prohibited materials being burned and the violation should be reported to the wildfire reporting line when there are concerns about wildfire risk.

Wildfire reporting line: 1 800 663-5555 or *5555 on a cell phone
RAPP hotline: 1 877 952-7277 or #7277 on a cell phone

Fires to Date

Total 29

Lightning 2

Person 27

Number of fires since last Newsletter (May 11)

Total 16

Lightning 1

Person 15

Fire Danger Rating today



Current Prohibitions (within BCWS jurisdictional area)

Category 2 open fires are prohibited in the Coastal Fire Centre except in the Haida Gwaii Natural Resource District and the 'Fog Zone'

Wildfire news

Coastal Fire Centre

Weather

SYNOPSIS: (Thursday-Friday) The upper ridge is now centred east of Coastal zones and a weak upper trough is advancing onto the outer coast. Significant marine cloud layers are bringing fair shading to most areas this morning but will generally clear by mid-day. Afternoon temperatures will again rise to above seasonal normal but likely stay a few degrees cooler than yesterday. Afternoon minimum relative humidity readings are forecast to be slightly higher (more moisture) today and afternoon inflow winds will again increase in the usual wind prone areas reaching the 15 to 20 km/h range. With the recent lack of rain, the drought codes are well above the normal and combined with the above seasonal temperatures, result in significant potential fire behaviour. A fire behaviour advisory has been issued for C3 and C7 fuels in the Fraser Canyon and D'Arcy areas.

The weak system crossing today brings only cooler temperatures, higher humidity and

some gusty afternoon winds. No showers are expected over southern zones and no thunderstorms are likely either. A few showers are possible either over the mountain range peaks and certainly over the North Coast and Haida Gwaii areas but amounts will be slight. Much the same tomorrow weather with afternoon temperatures falling a few degrees and somewhat higher humidity. A fire behaviour advisory is unlikely on Friday.

OUTLOOK: (Saturday-Monday) The weak upper trough pushes east on the weekend allowing the next upstream ridge to build in, bringing continued dry weather and an increase in afternoon highs for southern areas. This southern ridge peaks Sunday and weakens again Monday. From northern Vancouver Island to Haida Gwaii including the Mid-coast, a band of rain arrives by Saturday afternoon and continues most of Sunday and Monday.

What is the venting index and why does it matter?

The Venting Index is a numerical value related to the potential of the atmosphere to disperse smoke and other pollutants. It is based on both the current wind speed in the mixed layer and the mixing height. The mixed layer is the surface layer of air that is turbulent and



well mixed. The mixing height is the thickness (sometimes zero) of this mixed layer. Adequate venting is required to disperse the smoke generated by open burning. If there is not adequate venting, the smoke settles over the area it originates from, like the smoke in the photo to the left.