

Submitted by Alexis Baker, Environmental Programs Coordinator
When to Burn?

The North Carolina Fire Prevention Code, Section 307 on Open Burning, is a good place to start when deciding what and when to burn. The catch phrase of the Division of Air Quality is: "If It Doesn't Grow, Don't Burn it". They specifically ask homeowners not to burn garbage, paper, cardboard, rubber products, building materials, wire, plastics, shingles, paints, household and agricultural chemicals, buildings, mobile homes, and other structures. Homeowners should also refrain from burning on Code Orange, Red, or Purple days; these are the worst days for ozone and air quality. Also be aware of burn bans during drought conditions.

On the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources' website, it is noted that illegal burning can incur a fine of up to \$10,000. A permit or permission must be obtained for burning outside of allowable uses. Fires recognized for silviculture or range or wildlife management practices, prevention and control of diseases or pests, or a bonfire must receive a permit. Homeowners in Henderson County are allowed to burn yard trimmings if no public pickup is available. Additionally, campfires, outdoor barbeques, and bonfires are allowable. As noted, however, bonfires require a permit. Landowners can also burn vegetation to clear right-of-ways. However, such burnings must occur between 8am and 6pm and be 1,000 feet away from occupied buildings. Prevailing winds must also be away from built up areas and roads. Setback waivers may be obtained on the Division of Forest Resources' website.

Open burnings must also be at least 50 feet away from any structures and provisions must be made to keep the fire from spreading within 50 feet of the structure. Exceptions to this rule include fires in approved containers that are not less than 15 feet from a structure. However, even with the use of an approved container, when a pile reaches three feet, the distance from the structure must be 25 feet. Bonfires and recreation fires should also not be within 25 feet of a structure or combustible material unless it is in a barbeque pit. All fires must be attended until the fire is extinguished. Fire extinguishers or other extinguishing equipment, such as water hoses or dirt, must be available to use quickly.

Homeowners should also note that smoke from burning causes health effects. Not only can burning trash cause lung and eye irritation, it can cause headaches, dizziness, asthma attacks, and coughing. Additionally, trash can contain chemicals such as dioxins and other toxins. These toxins can leach into the soil and be taken up by plants and enter streams, ponds, or groundwater. Incomplete burnings can also leave behind remnants which could be eaten by smaller animals, causing illness and death.

For more information on burning and fire prevention or to obtain a permit, please visit http://www.dfr.nc.gov/burn_permits/burn_standard.asp.

Alexis can be contacted at 694-6524 or by email at alexisbaker@hendersoncountync.org