

Outdoor Burning



Harris County
HCPHES
Public Health & Environmental Services
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Outdoor Burning

Outdoor burning, in general, is illegal in Harris County because it contributes to air pollution. However, there are some exceptions in which burning is allowed. In those cases, the Outdoor Burning Rule has been designed to protect the environment and promote public health and safety.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services (HCPHES) regulate outdoor burning according to TCEQ rules. Outdoor burning is only authorized through the TCEQ rules. Fire Marshals and Fire Chiefs do not have the authority to authorize outdoor burning. The Fire Marshal can, however, prohibit all outdoor burning when a Burn Ban is issued. Outdoor burning is not authorized when a Burn Ban has been issued unless specifically permitted by the TCEQ.

Alternatives to Burning

What can you do instead of burning your waste?

Here are a few ideas:

Recycling is separating paper, glass, plastics, aluminum and other metals, computer and small electronic waste from trash material. Some materials can be sold at a salvage yard or donated at a recycling center or landfill.

Composting wastes from landscape maintenance can often be easily composted on site. Similar wastes, even some papers, can be composted under the right conditions.



Mechanical Chipping or Mulching of wood and plant products can be used for soil enrichment, moisture retention and creating compost. In some cases, mulch can be a marketable product and put to use where it is produced or given to residents and nurseries. If the material cannot be used as landscape mulch, chipping can still be useful to reduce the volume of waste that must be disposed of by

some other means.

Logging of trees cleared for development sometimes can be converted to a marketable product—lumber, pulp or firewood—as one way to reduce the costs of disposal.

Landfills are a permitted outdoor area for waste disposal. Some landfills have recycling centers with chippers for wood waste and collection bins for paper, plastic and glass.

What I need to know ...

Domestic Wastes

- You may burn domestic waste if garbage collection is not provided by a municipality or utility district.
- Domestic wastes include waste that normally results from the function of life within a residence and include: kitchen garbage, untreated lumber, cardboard boxes, packaging (including plastics, rubber), clothing, grass, leaves, and branch trimmings.
- Burning may occur only on properties used exclusively as a private residence not housing more than 3 families.

Businesses cannot burn domestic waste!

Plant Growth

- On-site burning of trees, brush, grass, leaves, branch trimmings and other plant growth by the property owner or authorized agent is allowed if there is no practical alternative.
- Because of the air quality issues in Harris County, TCEQ region 12 will generally require a practical alternative.
- Only TCEQ may determine if a practical alternative exists.
- If there is no practical alternative then the material must be generated from the property on which the burning occurs, generated as a result of right-of-way maintenance or land clearing operations or maintenance along water canals.



Crop Residue Burning

- Burning of crop residue for agricultural management purposes is allowed when no practical alternative exists.
- Burning of crop residue is subject to general requirements for allowable outdoor burning.
- Structures containing sensitive receptors (humans and livestock) must not be negatively impacted by the burn.
- Notification to TCEQ is recommended but not required.

Outdoor Burning Requirements

Outdoor burning which is otherwise authorized is also subject to additional requirements. The outdoor burning must not create a nuisance condition or a traffic hazard. Additional requirements apply and are included in the table below.

Requirements for Allowable Outdoor Burning	Domestic Waste Burning	Burning of Plant Growth	Burning of Crop Residue
Burning must take place outside corporate limits of a city or town.		X	X
Smoke and pollutants from burning will not be allowed to cause adverse effects to any public road, landing strip, navigable water, or occupied offsite structure.		X	X
Burning must be conducted at least 300 ft. downwind of an offsite occupied structure unless written approval has been obtained from the owner/person in possession of the structure.		X	X
Burning may commence no earlier than 1 hour after sunrise and must be completed no later than 1 hour before sunset.		X	X
The fire must be attended at all times.		X	X
Burning shall not occur when the wind speed is less than 6 MPH or greater than 23 MPH.		X	X
Electrical insulation, treated lumber, plastics, non-wood construction demolition material, oils, asphaltic material, chemical wastes, explosive materials, and items containing rubber may not be burned.	X	X	X
Burning may not be conducted during a Burn Ban issued by Harris County Commissioners Court.	X	X	X

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To Report Illegal
Outdoor Burning
Or

If You Have Any Questions
Call HCPHES: 713-920-2831

TCEQ Region Office: 713-767-3714

