

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Controlled Burn Guidelines

Burn operations that are conducted to burn weeds and other plant growth are a part of your operations. Unfortunately, GPP has seen an increase in claims from burn operations. An analysis of 41 burn claims conducted by GPP has indicated that 32% of these claims were caused by failure to extinguish properly, and 27% were classified as wind-related loss of control. Burn operations should never be considered to be a routine part of the day. Every controlled burn is a “special event,” and management should be taking the lead role in planning and conducting the operation.

Every organization should have a written guideline and process for controlled burns. The guideline should be reviewed periodically to verify that it meets all local, regional and state guidelines for open burns. It should also be provided periodically to your local fire department or district for its review and input. Naturally, your organization should use the guideline to conduct a controlled burn.

Every effort should be made to have the fire department present at the controlled burn. Scheduling of the burn so that the fire department can be present with personnel, fire suppression equipment and water supply will help to reduce the possibility of a rekindled fire or one driven out of control by wind. An excellent way to entice the fire department to participate would be to offer the controlled burn as training to the fire department or to provide the fire department with a small stipend or donation to cover its expenses. The fire department is an excellent resource to use to provide help in conducting a controlled burn.

The following are some basic guidelines to include in your written procedures. It is important that management be involved in each step of the planned burn:

1. Obtain and use your state’s procedures and standards for conducting controlled burns. Prior to the burn season, contact the state agency to see if there are any changes to those procedures. If there are changes, incorporate them into your guideline.
2. Review the state standards and your burn procedures with any personnel that will be participating in controlled burns prior to your first burn of the season. At the same time, any equipment that is used for burns should be inspected and repaired to assure that it is in good working condition.
3. Meet with the local fire department to discuss the coming burn season. Review its burn procedures and inform the fire department where burns may be conducted in the coming season. The communication process for informing the fire department of a specific burn should also be agreed upon. The fire department can provide suggestions as to the minimum suppression equipment and amount of water supply you will need to conduct any burns.
Hold a pre-burn meeting with any staff participating in the burn. There should be no fewer than three staff participating in any burn. For a large burn, more staff should be involved.
4. Review the following at the pre-burn meeting:
 - a. The specific area to be burned.
 - b. Hazards adjacent to or in the burn area. Never burn near structures, haystacks, wooden bridges, wooden telephone poles, or vehicles or equipment that may contain fuel.

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- c. The weather report. Prior to a burn, a weather report should always be obtained and shared with staff. Emphasis should be placed on the wind conditions for the time of burn, air temperature, and relative humidity. Favorable weather conditions for a burn are (1) wind speeds of 5 to 15 mph, (2) steady wind direction, (3) air temperature between 40° F and 80° F, and (4) relative humidity of 25% to 60%.*
 - d. Fire department notification. Inform the fire department of the location and estimated start and finish time of the planned burn.
 - e. Communications equipment distribution. All participants should have communications equipment that has been tested to verify that it is in working order.
 - f. Precautions and Supplies. Verify that adequate fire suppression equipment and water supply will be available at the burn site.
 - g. Management should complete the Pre-Burn documentation. This must be completed at the start of the burn.
5. Management should be present at the burn location during the initial stages of the burn. Document weather conditions on the Controlled Burn Form. Inspect the area thoroughly to identify and clear the area of any wildlife or people. This is also a good time to verify the exact area to be burned with the burn staff. Confirm that major fire suppression equipment and water supply are in a safe, yet easily accessible, location. At least 500 gallons of water, 100 feet of hose, and a pump should be available at the burn site.
 6. Halt the burn if necessary. If at any time during the burn, there is a substantial change in weather conditions (especially wind speed) that could cause an out-of-control burn, stop the burn, use the suppression equipment to extinguish the fire, and notify Management. If you believe that the fire is out of control, immediately contact the fire department and then begin to control the fire with your fire suppression equipment. At the same time, notify Management.
 7. Remain on site following a successful burn for at least 90 minutes after the fire has been extinguished. Prior to leaving the site, notify Management that the burn is complete.
 8. Have Management travel to the burn site and conduct a post-burn inspection to verify that a successful burn was completed. Notify the fire department that the burn is complete and that management and staff are leaving the burn site.
 9. Hold a post-burn meeting at your office to complete the burn documentation and discuss any problems or issues encountered during the burn process.

*Texas A & M University, Agricultural Services, Prescribed Burn Conditions.

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Controlled Burn Documentation Form

Date of Burn: _____

Time Started Burn: _____

Time Burn Extinguished: _____

Staff Leaving Burn: _____

Staff Participating in Burn: _____

Location of Burn: _____

Description of Burn: _____

Weather Conditions Verified:

Date: _____ Time: _____ Source: _____

As Acceptable: Yes No Initials: _____

Fire Department Notified: Date: _____ Time: _____

Fire Suppression Equipment at Burn: _____

Water Supply at Burn: _____

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Any unusual incidents, change in weather conditions, or other important information during the burn:

Burn Completed: Date: _____ Time: _____

Special District Management: _____

(Signature)

Date _____ Time _____

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