

Backyard Burning Frequently Asked Questions

What Is Backyard Burning?

Backyard burning is the use of an outdoor fire to dispose of natural vegetation originating on the property of a single or two family dwelling. The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District's Rule 438 requires a permit for backyard burning.

What are the health effects caused by smoke?

Smoke is a form of air pollution that primarily consists of particulate matter. This fine particulate can be inhaled deep into the lungs causing reduced lung function, asthma attacks, acute bronchitis and respiratory infections. Smoke exposure aggravates lung disease and can also lead to heart problems. Other components of smoke include gaseous air pollutants such as hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, and carbon monoxide, which can cause other health effects.



What is a Smoke Sensitive Area (SSA)?

A SSA is defined in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 1561.1 as any place where smoke can adversely affect the public health and welfare. Typically these are valleys where terrain and weather conditions combine to create an air stagnation situation which can cause wintertime smoke levels to rise to unhealthy levels primarily due to wood burning for residential heating purposes. The two Smoke Sensitive Areas in our area are defined in Air District Rule 438 Open Outdoor Fires ([Rule 438](#)). These include the San Lorenzo Valley where wintertime smoke particulate levels can exceed the federal ambient air quality standard for fine particulates (PM2.5) and the Monterey Peninsula and Carmel Valley.

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Why is the San Lorenzo Valley considered a Smoke Sensitive Area?

The San Lorenzo Valley is considered a Smoke Sensitive Area because of its unique geography and densely populated neighborhoods. Low elevation temperature inversions, a condition where a layer of warm air is situated between cold air both above and below, frequently develop in the winter. A temperature inversion acts as a lid on this narrow valley. Smoke emissions from wood burning stoves and backyard burning can get trapped within the valley, causing the particulate level to exceed health standards.

How do I know if I live within the San Lorenzo Valley Smoke Sensitive Area?

Check the map on the Air District's website. If it's difficult to determine because you live in an area near the border of the SSA or if you don't have access to a computer, contact the Air District at (831) 647-9411.

Will the new requirements shut down my fireplace?

The new requirements **only** address residential backyard burning of vegetation. The Air District currently has no specific rules related to burning wood in fireplaces and wood burning stoves. However, the District does have the ability to enforce impacts from improper use of woodstoves and fireplaces if the smoke is causing a public nuisance. Visually check the smoke coming from your chimney after a 30 minute startup period. You should only be seeing a slight amount of visible smoke if you are burning dry and seasoned wood, are maintaining an adequate air supply and are maintaining a hot fire.

When and where can I get a smoke management permit?

Permits are issued at your local Fire District or at the Air District's website. A Fire District burn permit can serve the dual purpose of a fire safety and a smoke management permit, however, not all Fire District's issue burn permits. If this is the case, a smoke management permit application can be filled out on the Air District's website



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anytime day or night at www.montereybaycleanair.org . The permit is issued immediately. There is currently **NO FEE** for a smoke management permit. The smoke management permit is good for the entire burn season, but once you have the permit you must also get a daily authorization through the Air District's website prior to burning.

I don't own a computer so how can I get a permit?

The quickest and easiest way is on-line, but if you don't have a computer then contact the Air District office at (831) 647-9411 between 8-12 and 1-5 Monday through Friday. Someone will gladly help you over the phone.

How do I know if I can burn today?

After you have obtained your permit and prior to conducting your burn you will need to do two things: 1) find out the burn status and 2) obtain a daily authorization. You can find out the "burn day" status by calling 1-800-CAL-BURN after 4:00 p.m. the day before you want to conduct the burn. A daily authorization may be requested through the Air District website or by contact the Air District office at (831) 647-9411.

How do I know if it is a 'burn' or 'no-burn' day?

Contact 1-800-CAL-BURN after 4:00 p.m. the day before you want to conduct your burn. Or check with your Fire District or the Air District website www.montereybaycleanair.org>Air Quality>Current Air Quality and Forecast.

How does the Air District allocate burns?

For areas outside of a SSA there is no daily limited allocation. Within the San Lorenzo Valley and Monterey

Current Air Quality and Forecast



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Peninsula/Carmel Valley SSA's daily limits are tracked through the daily authorization process on a first come first serve basis until the daily limit is met. For the SLV SSA, four burns will be authorized on any burn day within each of the Fire District's in the Valley: Felton, Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, Zayante and CAL FIRE.

What can I burn with a permit?

A backyard burn can only consist of dry and seasoned vegetation grown on the property where it is to be burned. Piled leaves and needles may not. Trash, garbage and plastics also may not be burned.

Can I still burn piles of redwood needles?

The burning of piled leaves and needles was prohibited in the last rule revision in 2011. They can only be disposed of through composting, yard waste recycling bins or by hauling to the local resource recovery center.

Can I burn if I have less than one acre and live within the SLV?

No. However, a waiver may be granted for various reasons and as long as the burn has no impacts on adjacent residences. The waiver is available at the discretion of the Air District following a site inspection.

I live outside of a smoke sensitive area. Why can't I burn on my property if it's smaller than ½ acre?

Parcels smaller than ½ acre are generally located within densely populated areas. Smoke from backyard burns conducted in these areas has the potential to expose a significant number of people to unhealthy levels of particulate.



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My property is larger than 1/2 acre, but I'm surrounded by houses closer than 100 feet from any good place to burn. Can I burn?

No. However, a waiver may be granted for various reasons and as long as the burn has no impacts on adjacent residences. The waiver is available at the discretion of the Air District following a site inspection.

How do I know the size of my parcel?

Parcel sizes can be determined through your County's Assessor's Office or you can contact the Air District at (831) 647-9411.

How do I file a complaint?

Smoke complaints can be reported to the Air District by calling (831) 647-9411.

