

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: RECREATIONAL & COOKING FIRES IN DES MOINES

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From the Office of the Fire Prevention Bureau – Phone (515) 283-4240



The City of Des Moines follows the State of Iowa Administrative Code 567-23.2(455B), the Polk County Board of Health Rules and Regulations Chapter V Air Pollution, and the City of Des Moines Municipal Code Chapter 46 Fire Prevention and Protection that address open flame cooking, bonfires, recreational fires within the State of Iowa, Polk County, and City of Des Moines.

Definitions

The following terms are defined in the International Fire Code and/or the Polk County Board of Health Rules and Regulations - Chapter V, Air Pollution 5-2 Definitions:

Bonfire - An outdoor fire (larger than a recreational fire) utilized for ceremonial purposes.

Firepit - a pit dug into the ground or encased in a surrounding structure (as of masonry or steel) in which a fire is kept burning for cooking, warmth, etc. (Merriam-Webster)

Fireplace - means a structure, with an open recess at the base of a chimney or stack, with a grate for food preparation and provisions for under-fire air, for holding an outdoor fire off the ground.

Fueled Open-Flame Devices/Fire Pits - a decorative flame device that burns fuel (propane, camping fuel, natural gas, etc.) designed to create ambience or provide warmth.

Grill - means a cooking utensil with a grate for food preparation and provisions for under-fire air, for holding an outdoor fire off the ground.

Open Burning - the burning of materials wherein products of combustion are emitted directly into the ambient air without passing through a stack or chimney from an enclosed chamber.

Recreational Fire - an outdoor fire burning materials other than rubbish where the fuel being burned is not contained in an incinerator, outdoor fireplace, portable outdoor fireplace, barbeque grill or barbeque pit and has a total fuel area of 3-feet or less in diameter and 2-feet or less in height for pleasure, religious, ceremonial, cooking, warmth or similar purposes. A recreational fire must be located a minimum of 25-feet from a structure or combustible material.

Grills and Fueled Open-Flame Devices/Fire Pits on Balconies

One- and two-family dwellings – the fire code exempts one- and two-family dwellings from regulation in regard to grills and open-flame devices; however, it is recommended that grills and fueled open-flame devices/fire pits, especially charcoal-type grills, be at least 10 feet away from any structure or combustible material.

Multi-family dwellings (apartments, condos, townhouses, etc.) – the only grills allowed on the balconies of multi-family dwellings are gas grills that use no more than one 20-pound propane cylinder. Charcoal grills or similar type grills are not allowed on balconies. Fueled open-flame devices/fire pits are not allowed on balconies and require a permit for any use/installation in common areas.

What is open burning, and can I conduct open burning in Des Moines?

Open burning is any outdoor fire larger than the recreational fire. Open burning is conducted most often to maintain prairie grasslands. Open burning is NOT allowed in Des Moines, unless a permit is obtained through the Polk County Air Quality Division.

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Can I have a recreational fire in Des Moines?

Recreational fires are NOT allowed in Des Moines, unless the fire is only utilized for cooking, it complies with the appliance construction requirements, and is extinguished when the cooking is completed.

Outdoor fireplaces or grills burning untreated wood or charcoal used solely for the non-commercial preparation of food. Such fires shall be extinguished upon completion of the food preparation. Such fires shall be conducted in an appliance that: provides for air entrainment underneath the fuel source, provides a cooking grate, and provides a non-combustible cover. Recreational fires are limited to three feet in diameter and two feet in height and must be a minimum of 25-feet from a structure or combustible material. (Reference: DSM Ordinance Chapter 46-72 Section 307.4.2)

Why are fire pits sold in the city if we can't use them?

It is not illegal for stores within the City to sell fire pits and chimineas. These items may be purchased for use outside of the City limits.

Can fire pits, chimineas, and similar devices be used to burn twigs, wood, leaves, and other yard waste materials within the city limits?

The burning of yard waste is NOT allowed in Des Moines.

For more information please review the following links:

Iowa DNR – Air Quality: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Air-Quality>

Polk County Air Quality: <https://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/public-works/air-quality/>

The City of Des Moines - Code of Ordinances:

https://library.municode.com/ia/des_moines/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=MUCO_CH46FIPRPR

What are the penalties if found in violation of the City Ordinance?

Failure to comply with these requirements may result in municipal infractions (CDM Ordinance, Section 46-4 (a)):

- The first violation within the calendar year yields a municipal infraction of \$250.00
- The second and each subsequent violation within a calendar year yields a municipal infraction of \$500.00

Any comments or questions regarding the above information may be submitted to:

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