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Outdoor Burning by Permit - March 1

March 1st marks the opening of outdoor burning by permit in western Montana. All burns require a permit, which you may obtain at the County Burn Permit System online at <https://app.mt.gov/burnpermit/>. Folks can also get a permit at a local fire department station, but should call ahead to confirm the option is available in 2016. All permits cost \$5. Also, don't forget that you can RENEW your permit. All of your information from last year is saved and ready to go. Check your mail each spring for a postcard with your permit number, or call the City-County Health Department (258-4755). Burn permit reminder postcards were mailed this year on February 17th.

Before lighting your fire you must activate your permit either online or by calling the automated activation phone line at 1-888-583-6497 after 9:00 am on the day you wish to burn. When dispersion is poor, burn restrictions are required to protect public health.

In 2015, in Missoula County alone, over 4,000 permits were sold, and those permit holders burned more than 10,000 times.

As you read this, hundreds of federal, state, and local government responders in the area are preparing for the upcoming fire season. Missoula County Fire Protection Association (MCFPA.org) is an association representing these responders. As your neighbors, we'd like to remind everyone how to lower the risk to first responders and the public when debris piles are burned.

One less spark equals one less wildfire. In March and April of 2015, 20 burn piles got away from those who lit them in Missoula County. Combined, these wildfires burned 50 acres. It's up to all of us to limit the number of wildfires. It starts by taking a moment to think about those things you're about to do that may produce a spark and result in a wildfire to which firefighters will respond. Two overwhelmingly common factors are related to human-caused wildfires:

1. Pile is not lined and the fire creeps into dry grass, and
2. People burn on high wind days and sparks spread to dry grass.

Make sure everything you burned is cold to the touch before you leave it unattended at any time of day or night by drowning it with water and stirring it to expose residual heat. Afterwards, cold-trail the blackened coals with the back of your hand. Most people who lose burns have left the pile only for a short time and return to a fire running through dry grass. Always have a charged hose or bucket of water, leather gloves, and hand tools available on-site when you burn anything.