

Burning In Rural Areas

This article will describe the process for burning in RURAL areas only. Requirements for burning permits vary from county to county, and even township to township. One of the reasons for getting a permit is that the permit will list requirements or restrictions for proper burning.

Columbia County is in a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulated area. Its residents must have a DNR permit to burn anytime between Jan. 1 and May 31 (except when the ground is completely snow covered). These no-cost permits are good for the calendar year and may be acquired at your local fire department.

However, with the COVID-19 issue this year, for those in Columbia County, it is highly recommended that you obtain a DNR permit over the phone by calling (888) 947-2876 or online at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestFire/restrictions.html> . The permit will either be mailed or instantly e-mailed to you.

You must have your permit with you when burning and be able to show it to law enforcement, fire, or DNR personnel when asked. After obtaining a permit, on the day you wish to burn, you must see if burning will be allowed for the day and what restrictions may be in place by checking with the DNR. You can visit their website as listed above. Posting this link to your computer desktop is a very quick and easy way to access the information. You can also call their toll free number as listed above and enter code 11 for Columbia County. Calling the toll free number or checking the website to view daily restrictions must be done after 11 a.m. as these are not posted until that time. If burning is allowed on that day, you will be advised as to the times you are allowed to burn, usually from 6 p.m. to midnight.

Dodge County (phone code 14) and Dane County (phone code 13) are not in DNR regulated areas. The Town of Calamus and Town of Elba require no burning permit. The Town of Portland and Town of York require local permits issued by town officials. You must have any permit with you while burning. The restrictions are greater in Columbia County than in Dodge and Dane Counties, however, common sense should prevail in all areas.

Every year, fire departments are needlessly sent on wild goose chases because someone was doing a controlled burn but either did not alert authorities ahead of time or were not tending to the fire. Someone else ends up reporting a fire, and we are sent. This causes numerous issues for fire departments. Tax dollars are wasted with a needless response, firefighters may need to leave work for nothing, emergency vehicles are now on the road for no reason, we may be needlessly at a controlled burn at one end of our district when we are needed at a real emergency at the other end of our district, and so on.

In all areas, to prevent unnecessary emergency responses, those wanting to burn should call a dispatch center. If you are in Columbia County or the Town of York, please contact the Columbia County Sheriff's Dispatch Center at (608) 742-4166, ext. 1, to advise them that you will be burning. If you are in Dodge County, please call the Dodge County Sheriff's Dispatch at (920) 386-3726, ext.4. Informing the county dispatch before burning is more important than ever because of the number of people driving with cell phones who might call in a fire that is actually under control. Please help us eliminate those wild goose chases each year.

While not required in Dodge or Dane Counties, it is highly recommended to check the DNR website or call their toll free number to see if burning is advised that day. It is still recommended to burn after 6 p.m.

Burning without a permit, burning outside required designated hours, burning items that are prohibited, not following restrictions found on the permit, leaving fires unattended, allowing fires to reach and damage another person's property, losing control of a controlled burn requiring a fire department response or not notifying authorities prior to burning may lead to fines, payment of damages, and paying for fire suppressions costs. This may be over \$500. In all cases, you must make sure that the fire is attended at all times and extinguished before leaving. The wind must be from a direction that will not cause smoke to drift across a roadway and create a traffic hazard or a nuisance for neighbors. If you set a fire, you are responsible for any negative results that may arise!

Burning of the following items is allowed... brush, leaves, needles, grass, paper, cardboard, and clean wood (unpainted, unstained, untreated).

According to the DNR, burning of the following items is NOT allowed... garbage, plastics, shingles, foam, structures, furniture, wire, metal, electronics, vinyl products, rubber products, oil-based products, and painted/stained/treated wood.

If you have any questions on burning or permits, you can contact the fire department at 623-5914.

Again, this is for burning in rural areas only. Next month's column will address what the regulations are in the City of Columbus.