

FOR 4/3/19 PUBLICATION

As the weather becomes favorable for pile burning, the Plumas County Fire Safe Council Board Chair, Don Gasser, provides some insight into how to set up for a successful burn:

Once the weather and the rules make it possible, it is time to burn the piles that you created and covered over the course of the previous months. Trees, branches, cones, leaves and needles may be in these piles - but nothing human-made. Materials to be burned should be cut and down for at least three weeks and be mostly dry. A good mix of sizes will make for a faster burn. Dry material will create a cleaner burn with less smoke. A pile of nothing but pine needles is sure to produce a lot of smoke and slow consumption.

Ignition is always a decision and an action that needs sober assessment, taking into account wind direction and force, as well as looking ahead at the weather for the next few days. First, check with Air Quality to make sure it is a permissive burn day in your area. Many burn days should be passed up if you are on a south-facing slope or in a vulnerable area with other dry vegetation nearby, or if winds are projected to put your smoke toward the neighbors. Many burns can take longer than planned as things like stump holes can burn for days. Some conditions are not easily predicable and continued watchfulness is the key to preventing an escape. A pile may be hot for days after burning, and a 'torcher' must be sure that the burn is not followed by drying windy weather. A change in wind can stir the 'extinguished' fire into glowing embers and flying firebrands. Many large wildfires started as small prescribed fires that were assumed to be out.

After the ground and surroundings have been heated by your good hot fire, creeping fire may result. It is a good idea to have wide separation between targeted fuel and surrounding vegetation. It is always good to have a charged water line nearby. Many times, fire wants to spread to adjacent dry piles or adjacent vegetation or overhead tree threats that are too close, and a hose can make a quick reversal of fire in the wrong place.

As the fire season approaches, this and other topics will be addressed at Plumas County Fire Safe Council meetings. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 11th, 2019 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am at the Plumas County Planning & Building Services office, 555 Main Street in Quincy. Council meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month and are attended by citizens, business owners, and representatives from local, state, and federal government agencies, who share a common interest in preventing loss of life and minimizing loss of property from wildland fires.