

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

About The Online Burn Permit System for Missoula County, Montana

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How do I go to get a Burn Permit in Missoula County?

Missoula County uses an Online Burn Permit System to streamline the busy job of issuing and tracking 5-8,000 permits annually. With the Online System, anyone living in Missoula County can get a Burn Permit at any time of day or night. *Even on the day of the burn, you can obtain and activate a permit if conditions allow safe burning.* Burn Permits cost \$5. The online system accepts credit cards and electronic checks.

You can also get a permit in-person using credit cards or checks. Cash is discouraged, but accepted in limited circumstances (see FAQ **What If I Want To Pay in Cash**). Here are your options for getting a permit:

- **ONLINE PERMIT:** Go to the Burn Permit Website: www.BurnPermit.mt.gov. Click on Start and select Missoula County. Note, the system will not accept data from those living outside of Missoula County, even if the applicant's fire department responds from Missoula County. Contact your local County for guidance. To practice online, there is a demonstration site at www.BurnPermit.mt.gov. Once you've completed the actual Burn Permit application, click Finish and **PRINT OUT PERMIT** for your records. Multiple copies may be a good idea, as you will need to reference your Burn Permit Number(s) every time you burn outdoors in Missoula County. If you lose your Permit / Number, we can help (see FAQ **What if I forget or lose my Permit Number?**).
- **IN-PERSON PERMIT:** You have several options, including your local **Rural** Fire Department. However, you must contact them first; not all are able to issue Burn Permits all of the time. Missoula City Fire Department **ONLY** issues burn permits through the Missoula City-County Health Department, which is another in-person option along with the Swan Ecosystem Center in Condon. The Swan, Clearwater and Missoula units of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) **only accept credit cards or check (no cash)**, but can issue a Burn Permit in person. US Forest Service offices are **not** able to issue Burn Permits.

How do I know what kind of Burn Permit that I need?

Three types of Burn Permit are available in Missoula County: *General Outdoor, Essential Agriculture, and Prescribed Wildland*. Note: All three can be suspended due to fire danger. Typically, this suspension occurs in July and can last through September.

- **GENERAL OUTDOOR BURNING** – General means cleanup and burning of untreated vegetative waste **that does not include trade waste**. All materials must be generated onsite. NOTE: In the Missoula County [Air Stagnation Zone](#), piles of grass or deciduous leaves **may not be disposed** of through Outdoor Burning. This permit is available March 1st and expires August 31st of each year.
- **ESSENTIAL AGRICULTURAL BURNING** – Essential Agriculture burning is conducted on a farm or ranch to eliminate excess vegetative matter from an irrigation ditch or cultivated fields, or to improve range conditions or wildlife habitat. Agricultural burning should **only be conducted when no reasonable alternative methods of disposal are available**. This permit is available March 1st and expires on October 31st of each year.
- **PRESCRIBED WILDLAND BURNING** – This type of outdoor burning is planned and conducted on forested land or relatively undeveloped range land to improve wildlife habitat or range conditions,

promote forest regeneration, reduce fire hazards resulting from forestry practices, control forest pests and diseases, and/or promote any other accepted silvicultural practices. This permit is available March 1st and expires November 30th of each year.

Can I get a Burn Permit if I live in the City of Missoula?

Parcels within the city limits of Missoula, Montana, that are at least one (1) acre in size may qualify for a General Season Outdoor Burn Permit. City residents may purchase a Permit online or at the City-County Health Department. **Note: the Permit will not be eligible for activation until after the burn site has been inspected by the Missoula Fire Department.** Once the City Fire Department approves the burn, it can be activated either online or via the phone, if fire-safety conditions are favorable. All burns MUST be activated on the day you wish to burn.

I have a Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA). Why do I still need this Burn Permit?

To burn logging slash in Missoula County, you must have permits for fire and air quality. Having a Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA) may mean you don't need a Fire Burn Permit, but you are still required to have an Air Quality Permit. The Missoula County Burn Permit System combines both requirements.

What if I have multiple burn piles? Do I need a separate \$5 Permit for each one?

No. Each Permit holder can have several burn locations. The Online System will ask you to identify each one. Keep in mind that you are responsible for burns in all locations that you identify and **you must activate your permit by each location when there is more than one.**

- ONE EXCEPTION TO MULTIPLE FIRES = 1 PERMIT RULE: If you need two different types of Burn Permits (one for "General" and one for "Essential Agriculture," for example), you will need to pay for two permits (\$10).

How can I pay for my Burn Permit?

There are two ways to pay for your \$5 Burn Permit. The Online System is secure and will accept any major credit card. Or you can pay for your Burn Permit with an electronic check. Cash payments are discouraged.

What if I don't have access to a computer with Internet to get a Burn Permit?

You can still get your Missoula County Burn Permit without access to the Internet, but it means going to a *rural* fire department, the Missoula City-County Health Department, the Swan Ecosystem Center in Condon or a Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Unit Office in Missoula County. Please call ahead: Not all departments/offices have someone there at all times. Permits are \$5. You can pay with credit card or check, which is what the online system accepts. Note: Some agencies cannot accept cash. For more information, see FAQ **How Do I Get a Burn Permit?**

What if I want to pay for my Burn Permit with cash?

Cash payments are discouraged, but if this is the only way you can pay, go to the Missoula City-County Health Department in Missoula at 301 West Alder Street. Note: Missoula City residents must obtain their Burn Permits at the Health Dept., whether paying by cash, check or credit card. You can also pay cash at the Swan Ecosystem Center in Condon. Your local rural fire department may accept cash, but check ahead as they are not open all the time and may not accept cash. **Call before you go is the best option.**

I used to make a donation to my fire department. Can I still do that?

Absolutely! Fire departments will still take donations. The \$5 Permit Fee will not go to your fire department. Permit fees are needed to pay for the setup cost and administration of the Online System.

How do I know if I can burn the day that I want to burn?

Once you have a Missoula County Burn Permit, you must activate it before starting your burn after 9 am. Just call 1-888-583-6497, the phone number on the Permit -- or log into the Online Burn Permit System at www.BurnPermit.mt.gov. If you can safely burn that day, you will be able to activate your Permit.

REMEMBER: **You MUST activate your Permit on each day you plan to burn.**

How do I “activate” my Missoula County Burn Permit?

There are two ways to activate a Burn Permit in Missoula County, as described below.

- Go to www.BurnPermit.mt.gov . Click on Start and select Missoula County and follow the steps to “Activate” your Permit.
- Call 1-888-583-6497. You must have your Permit Number to activate your Permit, so be sure you print out a copy.

Note: The Online System / Phone Activation System may tell you that you cannot burn that day due to fire danger conditions.

The System doesn’t recognize my rural address. What do I do?

Try entering your address in a different format if the Online Burn Permit System doesn’t recognize your address. For example, if your address is “12345 Hwy 83,” try entering it as “12345 85 Hwy N.” Data used to reference street addresses is based on Cadastral data, which is entered in this format. You can also find your property using the Online System. Just click the location on the map where you will be burning OR you can use a latitude/longitude from a GPS instead. Note: System will only accept Missoula County addresses.

Who do I call if I’m having a problem with the Online Burn Permit System?

If you have questions about Outdoor Burning or the Online Permit System, you can contact the Missoula City-County Health Department at (406) 258-4755. For technical issues, such as a Permit Website malfunction, contact Montana Interactive through the Online System or call them at (406) 449-3468.

What if I forget or lose my Burn Permit Number?

You need a hard copy of your Missoula County Burn Permit when you burn and you need your Permit Number to activate your Permit. If you lose/misplace your Permit, you may get your Number as follows:

- Call the Missoula City-County Health Department in Missoula at (406) 258-4755
- Rural residents, call your local **rural** fire department (*phone directory at mcfpa.org*)
- Missoula City residents, call the City-County Health Department at (406) 258-4755
- Call the local unit (Swan, Clearwater or Missoula) of the Montana DNRC (*mcfpa.org directory*)
- Call the Swan Ecosystem Center at (406) 754-3137

Note: The Missoula-City County Health Department typically mails out a Burn Permit Number Reminder postcard to residents who burned with a Burn Permit the previous year. Look for these postcards in the weeks before the March 1st Open Burning Season start date.

What if I forget to activate my Burn Permit?

You must activate your Burn Permit each day that you plan to burn and for each location in which you plan to burn. Calling the phone number on your Permit (1-888-583-6497) and activating it on your burning day will ensure that people aren't burning on days when burning is closed due to poor air quality or fire danger. If you burn without activating your Permit, your burn will be treated as an illegal burn.

How early in the year can I get my Burn Permit?

You can purchase a Burn Permit from the Missoula County Online Burn Permit System as early as January, but they cannot be used (activated) until Burning season opens on March 1st.

What if I want to get my Burn Permit on the weekend?

You may! This is one of the biggest benefits to the Online Burn Permit System. You get your Permit when it is convenient for you. Simply log on to www.BurnPermit.mt.gov and get your Permit day or night. Some fire departments may still issue Permits on the weekend from their offices. Check with your local department for details.

If I activate my Burn Permit, do I still have to call the Burn Hotline for a Go/No Go?

No. By calling the phone number on your Burn Permit (1-888-583-6497) -- or by going online at www.BurnPermit.mt.gov -- to activate the Permit you learn whether fire-danger conditions allow a safe burn. You will not be able to activate unless burning conditions are good. Note: The Outdoor Burning Hotline (406) 258-4900 is still available. It is used by primarily by "major burners," such as the US Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy.

Why does Missoula County use an Online Burn Permit System?

Missoula County issues as many as 8,000 Burn Permits annually. At one time, getting a Permit required traveling to a fire department and maybe waiting in line. Some departments were inundated by the job of writing permits. The Online Burn Permit System improves this process considerably. Anyone can now get a \$5 Permit at any time, even on the day they want to burn! The system also streamlines information sharing between fire departments and dispatch centers. Prior to its adoption, firefighters spent hours searching through paper files to verify Burn Permits. Now, we have access to that information in a timely manner.

Thanks for using our Online Burn Permit System and doing your part in Missoula County to be Firewise and Fire Safe. Learn more, including safe burning tips, at the Missoula County Fire Protection Association website: www.mcfpa.org. Like us on Facebook !

