

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?

Missoula County uses an Online Burn Permit System to streamline the busy job of issuing and tracking 5-8,000 burn permits annually. With this system, anyone can get a permit to burn legal materials at any time of day or night -- even on the day of the burn. Permits cost \$5. The online system accepts credit cards and electronic checks. You can also purchase a permit with cash at local fire stations and state agencies, with a few exceptions. Specifics are below:

- **ONLINE PERMIT:** Go to the Burn Permit Website: www.BurnPermit.mt.gov. Click on Start and select Missoula County. If you want to practice the application process, there is a demonstration site at this same web address. Once the burn permit application is completed, click Finish and PRINT OUT YOUR PERMIT for your records. Multiple copies may be a good idea, as you will need to reference permit numbers every time you burn outdoors in Missoula County, including future seasons. This permit number will be yours to renew annually.
- **IN-PERSON PERMIT:** Go to your Missoula County [Fire Department](#) (check ahead first; not all of the fire stations are able to issue permits all the time) or to your government agency: [Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation \(DNRC\) Swan Unit, Clearwater Unit, or Missoula Unit](#) office (check ahead here, too; not all can accept cash payments). The [Missoula City-County Health Department](#) and the **Swan Ecosystem Center** in Condon also issues permits. **USDA Forest Service offices will not be able to take money in any form, so will be unable to issue permits at this time.**

How do I know what kind of permit I need?

There are three categories of burn permits available in Missoula County: General, Essential Agriculture, and Wildland. Descriptions are below:

- **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 [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.

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 are trying to get two different types of permits (one for “General” and one for “Essential Agriculture,” for example). In this case, you will need to pay for two permits (\$10).

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

The Missoula County burn permit actually combines requirements for both fire and air quality permits. Having an HRA may mean you don’t need a fire burn permit, but you are still required to have a Missoula County air quality permit. This permit covers both requirements.

Why do I have to pay \$5 for my permit, when they used to be free?

In a busy year, Missoula County issues more than 8,000 burn permits. Before joining the Online Burn Permit System in 2012, our local volunteer / rural fire departments and state offices (particularly in the spring) were inundated with calls and requests for burn permits. Plus, Citizen Burners had to travel to the fire station or government office during business hours and sometimes wait in line to get the permit. Fire departments, state and federal land-management agencies and local Emergency Dispatch Centers had no easy or quick way to verify whether a burn was permitted. The Online System streamlines all this for a very small fee.

- Specifically, your \$5 pays for the system and a transaction fee assessed for each permit. Without the fee, we cannot host the Online System. All collected monies are managed by the

Missoula City-County Health Department in a designated account *separate from individual fire departments*. One permit fee can cover multiple burns (*see multiple burns FAQ on page 1*).

How do I pay for my permit?

The Online Burn Permit System is secure and will accept any major credit card. Or you can pay with an electronic check. NOTE: Our rural fire stations are reliant upon volunteers and small tax bases, so donations are still welcome !! To make a donation, visit the department in person. Thank you.

Is my permit refundable?

No. Because the permit fee covers the system cost and transaction fee, we cannot give refunds. This includes permits issued within Missoula City limits that may not pass inspection.

What if I want to pay with cash?

Cash payments are discouraged. However, if this is the only way you can pay, you can still do so. If you need to pay with cash, you will need to go to the Missoula City-County Health Department at 301 West Alder St, Missoula, or check with your local DNRC office, Swan Ecosystem Center or with your local fire department. **PLEASE NOTE: Not all offices are open all the time and not all will take cash. The DNRC's Missoula and Clearwater Units do not accept cash. Best option: Call before you travel to get a permit.**

If I am paying with a paper check (not an e-check), who do I make it out to?

Paper check payments are treated like cash payments and are also discouraged. However, if you need to pay this way, you must go to a location that will accept cash payments (see "What if I want to pay with cash" above). Checks will be made out to the office where you are paying.

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

Absolutely! Fire Departments will still take donations. The \$5 fee for a permit will not go to the fire department, however, as it is needed to pay for the setup cost and administration of the online system.

How early in the year can I get my permit?

The Online Burn Permit System is available year round, but you cannot activate your permit until the start of the Montana and Missoula County burn seasons, which is March 1st. **IMPORTANT: Because burning season is often closed by early July to due to fire danger, burners are encouraged to burn early in the spring season. Fall burning is restricted to only Essential Agriculture and Wildland burning. For more information on our Burning Seasons, visit www.mcfpa.org/burning_seasons.htm.**

How do I know whether it's okay to burn on the day I want to burn?

Once you have your permit, you must activate it before burning. This process will tell you whether it's a good day to burn or conditions prohibit open burning that day. You can activate your permit by calling 1-888-583-6497 AFTER 9 am, or by the Online Burn Permit System at www.BurnPermit.mt.gov.

IMPORTANT: You MUST activate your permit on each day you plan to burn.

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- ONLINE: You can activate your permit online by going to www.BurnPermit.mt.gov. Click on Start and select Missoula County and follow the steps to "Activate" your permit.
- PHONE: You can also activate your permit by calling 1-888-583-6497. You must have your permit number to activate your permit, so be sure you print out a copy.

What if I forget to activate my burn permit?

You must activate your permit each day that you plan to burn and for each location at which you plan to burn. Calling the phone number on your permit (1-888-583-6497) or going online to activate the permit will ensure that you don't burn on a day 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.

What if I forget or lose my permit number?

You need a hard copy of your permit when you burn and you need your permit number to activate your permit. However, if you lose or misplace your permit, you may get your number by calling your local Fire Department, Montana DNRC Swan Unit, Clearwater Unit, or Missoula Unit offices, Missoula City-County health department, or the Swan Ecosystem Center.

What about the City burn permit process?

Parcels in Missoula city limits that are at least one (1) acre in size may qualify for a General Outdoor Burn Permit. City residents may purchase a permit online or in person at the City-County Health Department, but the permit will not be eligible for activation until after the burn site has been inspected by the Missoula City Fire Department. Once the City Fire Department approves the burn, it can be activated either online or via the phone. All burns MUST be activated on the day you wish to burn. Note: If your burn does not pass inspection, the burn permit fee cannot be refunded.

The system doesn't recognize my rural address. What do I do?

Try entering your address in a different format. For example, if your address is "12345 Hwy 83", try entering it as "12345 85 Hwy N". Unfortunately, the 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 Permit System. Just click the location on the map where you will be burning OR you can use a latitude/longitude from a GPS instead.

What if I live outside Missoula County, but my fire department is in the County?

The Online Burn Permit System only pertains to Missoula County residents. If you live outside the County, even if your firefighters respond from Missoula County, the system will not work for you. Contact your fire department to alert them to your burn and follow safe outdoor-burning practices. Note: The town of Alberton issues free permits. You can also call the Missoula Activation Line (1-888-583-6497) to determine whether it's a good day to burn. Tips at www.mcfpa.org/permits_info.htm

What if I want to get my permit on the weekend?

You may get one! This is one of the biggest benefits to the online system. You get your permit when it is convenient for you, whether it's a weekend or 3 am on a week night. No need to wait for an office to open. Simply log-on to www.BurnPermit.mt.gov and get a permit. Some fire departments may still issue permits on the weekend from their offices. Check with your local department for details.

What if I don't have access to a computer with internet?

If you cannot access the Online System, your fire department, state DNRC office, or the Missoula City-County Health Department can issue the County's \$5 burn permit. IMPORTANT: Please check with the organization before driving there. Not all fire departments have staff on duty at all times and two DNRC offices (Missoula and Clearwater) cannot accept cash. If in doubt, call before driving to the office.

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

If you have questions about outdoor burning in Missoula County or the online permitting process, you can contact the Missoula City-County Health Department at (406) 258-4755. For technical issues such as a burn permit website malfunction, you can contact Montana Interactive through the online permitting website or by calling them at (406) 449-3468.

Thanks for using our Online Burn Permit System and doing your part in Missoula County to be Firewise and Fire Safe. Learn more at www.mcfpa.org.