

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

About the Online Burn Permit System for Missoula County, Montana

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Why is Missoula County going to an Online Burn Permit system?

- Missoula County typically issues between 5,000 and 8,000 burn permits in a year. Getting a permit typically requires traveling to a fire department and may even include waiting in line. Some departments were inundated with nothing more than writing permits. For the very small fee of \$5, having the system available online should streamline this process considerably. Anyone can get their permit at any time, even on the day they want to burn! The system will also streamline information sharing between fire departments and dispatch centers. Under the old system, it often took many hours of searching through paper files to verify if someone had a burn permit. Now, we'll have that information in a timely manner.

Permits used to be free; why a \$5 permit fee?

- Your fee pays for the setup cost of the online system and also covers a transaction fee assessed for each permit. Without the fee we cannot host the online system. All collected monies will be managed by the Missoula City-County Health Department, separately from individual fire departments. Rural agencies, reliant upon volunteers and small tax bases, will continue to accept your individual donations. One permit fee can cover multiple burns. Just input this data into the new system (see multiple burns FAQ below).

Is my permit refundable?

- No. Because the cost of the permit is just to handle the setup and transaction fee, we cannot give refunds. This includes for permits within the City limits which may not pass inspection (see the city burn permit process at the end of this document).

Where do I go to get my burn permit?

- Website: www.BurnPermit.mt.gov . Click on Start and select Missoula County. If you want to practice, there is also 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.

- You can also obtain a burn permit from your local Fire Department (check first; not all of them are able to issue permits all the time). Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Swan Unit, Clearwater Unit, or Missoula Unit offices (check ahead, not all can accept cash payments), Missoula City-County health department, or the Swan Ecosystem Center also issue permits. US Forest Service offices will not be able to take money in any form, so will be unable to issue permits at this time.

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

- You can still get a permit, but you will need to drive to your local fire department, DNRC office, or health department office. Please check with the office before driving there. Not all departments have someone at the office at all times. You must still pay \$5 for the permit. Please note, not all offices will take cash; you may pay online with credit card or check. If in doubt, call before driving to the office.

How can I pay for my permit?

- The online system is secure and will accept any major credit card. Or you can pay with an electronic check.

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. Call before you go is the best option.

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.

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** – This permit expires August 31st of each year. 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.
 - **Essential Agriculture** – This permit expires on October 31st of each year. 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**.
 - **Prescribed Wildland** – This permit expires November 30th of each year. 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.

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 system will ask you to identify each one. Keep in mind that you are responsible for burns in all locations you identify and 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 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 do I know if I can burn?

- Once you have your permit, you must activate it before burning. Activation can take place by calling the phone number on the permit (similar to checking the burn hotline before), or by logging in to the burn permit online system to activate your permit. **You MUST activate your permit on each day you plan to burn.**

How do I activate my permit?

- 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.
- 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 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 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.

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.

How early can I get my permit?

- The system should be up and running before the start of General Burning Season, March 1st 2012.

I have a Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA) already. 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.

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 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.

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 want to get my permit on the weekend?

- You may! This is one of the biggest benefits to the online system. You get your permit when it is convenient for you, whether that is on the weekend or three in the morning. Simply log on to www.BurnPermit.mt.gov and get your permit. Some fire departments may still issue permits on the weekend from their offices. Check with your local department for details.

What about the City burn permit process?

- Parcels in the city of Missoula 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 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.

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.