



# Northville Township Fire Department

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## Outdoor Fire Guidelines

The following General Requirements are designed to provide the public with the proper guidance to prevent unwanted fires due to the unsafe and/or unlawful operation of outdoor fires and to further protect the safety, health and welfare of the community. The following General Requirements apply to all outdoor fires occurring within Northville Township and must be followed at all times.

### General Requirements:

- 1) **Permit.** A person shall not kindle or maintain or authorize to be kindled or maintained any open burning unless conducted and approved in accordance with this document (307.1). See the **Quick Reference Guide** for permit requirements. Permits are available at Northville Township Fire Department's Headquarters located at 45745 W. Six Mile Rd. weekdays between 08:00 am and 4:00 pm. Building Department permits are available at 44405 W. Six Mile Rd. weekdays between 08:00 am and 4:00 pm.
- 2) **Responsibility.** You are legally responsible for any fire that you start.
- 3) **Location.** See the **Quick Reference Guide** in regards to outdoor fire locations, minimum clearances to structures and combustibles and permit requirements. Use the **Definitions** section of this document to determine the type of outdoor fire you are conducting.
- 4) **Property.** Outdoor fires are only permitted on your property. Outdoor fires located on public property including businesses, schools, or churches must apply for a permit.
- 5) **Property lines.** A minimum of 15 feet of clearance from your side lot line is required. For permanent structures a Zoning Permit may be required. Contact the Building Department for further information.
- 6) **Other authority.** You are responsible to check with your local homeowners association, property management, rental or lease agreement, homeowner/renter's insurance agency or other authority in regards to outdoor fire restrictions.
- 7) **Purpose.** Outdoor fires are only permitted for ceremonial, recreational, cooking, warmth, religious or pleasure purposes.
- 8) **Attendance.** All fires shall be constantly attended until the fire is extinguished. Those in attendance must be responsible for the fire and capable of extinguishing and/or controlling the fire at all times.
- 9) **Extinguishment.** Completely extinguish the fire including the remaining ashes, cinders, embers or coals prior to leaving the fire (307.5). All ash, embers or remnants of a fire shall be properly cooled prior to disposal. All remnants shall be placed in a noncombustible container prior to disposal.
- 10) **Method of extinguishment.** A minimum of one (1) portable fire extinguisher with a minimum 4-A rating or other on-site fire-extinguishing equipment, such as dirt, sand, water barrel, or garden hose, shall be available for immediate use (307.5).
- 11) **Type of fuel.** Only dry, seasoned wood may be used. Firewood that is dried contains less moisture and produces fires that create less smoke.
- 12) **Waste disposal.** Outdoor fires shall not be used for waste disposal purposes such as the burning of paper, leaves, brush, trash or construction materials (Township Ordinance 149-11, 67-41, State of Michigan 324.11522).
- 13) **Quantity of fuel (size).** Under no circumstances shall a fire be started that exceeds a total fuel area of 3 feet in diameter by 2 feet in height without prior approval and permits.
- 14) **Ignitable liquids.** Gasoline, kerosene or other ignitable liquids are not permitted.

- 15) **Manufacturer's instructions.** It is your responsibility to follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper use of your device. If manufacturer's instructions cannot be produced, the most restrictive minimum clearance distances will be required.
- 16) **Hazardous conditions.** Open burning shall be prohibited when atmospheric conditions or local circumstances make such fires hazardous (307.1.1). It is your responsibility to visit [www.northvillemich.com/fire](http://www.northvillemich.com/fire) for information regarding open burning and outdoor fire bans or restrictions. Additionally, sign up for Northville Township Public Safety e-notifications to receive an email if burning is prohibited for any reason.
- 17) **Complaints.** Complaints received by the Department of Public Safety will be evaluated by the fire department on a case by case basis. The receipt of a complaint regarding open burning or outdoor fires may not require the fire to be extinguished if the outdoor fire complies with these listed guidelines. Fires that do not create a hazardous, unreasonably offensive or unreasonably objectionable situation may be permitted to continue.
- 18) **Prohibited burning.** Any open burning or outdoor fire that is deemed hazardous, unreasonably offensive or unreasonably objectionable because of smoke emissions or other conditions shall be prohibited even when complying with all of the above rules and regulations (307.1.1, 307.2.1). Any departure from the listed guidelines may lead to enforcement up to and including citation.
- 19) **Extinguishment authority.** Where outdoor fires create or add to a hazardous situation, a required permit has not been obtained, and/or the fire is deemed unreasonably offensive or unreasonably objectionable, the department is authorized to order the extinguishment of such fire (307.3).
- 20) **Future prohibitions.** The department reserves the right to prohibit outdoor fires on your property if these regulations are not followed or if you create a hazardous situation.

If you have any questions, please contact us at (248) 348-5807 or via email at [thughes@twp.northville.mi.us](mailto:thughes@twp.northville.mi.us).

Respectfully,



Thomas M. Hughes, Jr.  
Fire Marshal



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## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Why are there so many regulations?**

A: To reduce the risk of unwanted fires and fire spread resulting in injury, death and property damage. When used in accordance with this standard or the manufacturer's listings, the risk of an unwanted fire is low. In recent years the popularity of outdoor fires has including the type and style of device.

**Q: What is a one-and-two family home/dwelling?**

A: For the purposes of outdoor fires, one-and-two family dwellings are defined as dwelling units (homes/condos) that consist of one-and-two families only (single family homes and duplexes). Reductions in the minimum required clearances are permitted in one-and-two family homes because the level of familiarity and control exercised by the occupant is recognized as offsetting the hazards of these devices.

**Q: What is a multi-family home/dwelling?**

A: A multi-family home is any home/structure that consists of more than two dwelling units (homes/condos). Due to the hazards associated with the increased building size, the increased number of occupants, and possible fire travel, any structure that exceeds two families is considered to be a multi-family dwelling for the purposes of outdoor fires. This includes most apartments, condominiums, townhomes, etc.

**Q: Can I have an outdoor fire at my apartment, condominium or townhouse?**

A: Outdoor fires may be permitted at your apartment or condominium when in compliance with all of the general requirements include the condition that outdoor fires must be conducted on your property only. Consult with the property manager, rental agency, rental/lease agreements prior to conducting any open burning at any apartment, condominium or townhouse.

**Q: Can I have an outdoor fire at my church, school or other public location?**

A: Outdoor fires on public property may be permitted upon completion of a permit application and field inspection conducted by the fire department. Permit applications must be received at Fire Department Headquarters a minimum of 72 hours in advance of any outdoor fire. Inspections must be completed between the hours of 8:30 am and 4:00 pm, Monday-Friday. Permit applications must be completed, in person by an authorized representative of the property and may require a letter from the property owner.

**Q: Where do all of these rules come from?**

A: The Charter Township of Northville Ordinance 79-2 adopts the 2015 International Fire Code (IFC) as the Fire Prevention code in the Township. These regulations are taken from that code and clarified in this document to address common questions and provide clear guidance to the community. In areas not specifically identified in the IFC, other reference standards and generalized safety recommendations provided by the fire department were used.

**Q: What are manufacturer's instructions?**

A: Manufacturer's instructions are instructions provided by the manufacturer to outline the proper use of a particular device. Manufacturer's instructions are provided with commercially available devices including fire rings, burn pits, burn boxes, chimeneas, outdoor fireplaces, gas burners, fire tables, etc. and are designed with specific requirements. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper operation, location, clearances and hazards associated with your device. If you cannot find or produce the manufacturer's instructions the most restrictive clearance requirements must be met.



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## Definitions

### Bonfire

### PERMIT REQUIRED

Bonfires are permitted for ceremonial purposes only and require a permit, site inspection and fire department approval. Bonfires shall be a minimum of 50 feet from any structure or combustible material. Fire area must be surrounded by non-combustible materials to prevent the spread of fire to within 50 feet of a structure, i.e. stones, patio pavers, etc. (IFC def., 307.4.2). Conditions that can cause a fire to spread within 50 feet of a structure shall be eliminated prior to ignition (IFC def., 307.4.2). Bonfires will be evaluated on a case by case basis in regards to the topography, type of event, location, number of attendees and other safety factors.

**Example:** Open fire not contained in a fire pit or fireplace. Total fuel area exceeds 3 feet in diameter by 2 feet in height.

### Recreational fire

### PERMIT NOT REQUIRED

A recreational fire is an outdoor fire that is not contained within an outdoor fireplace, outdoor fire pit, portable outdoor fireplace, or other enclosed container and has a total fuel area of 3 feet or less in diameter and 2 feet or less in height. Recreational fires shall not be conducted within 25 feet of a structure of combustible material. Fire area must be surrounded by non-combustible materials to prevent the spread of fire to within 25 feet of a structure, i.e. stones, patio pavers, etc.. Conditions that could cause a fire to spread within 25 feet of a structure shall be eliminated prior to ignition (IFC def., 307.4.2).



**Example:** Campfire or outdoor fire that is not contained within a fire pit or fireplace. The fire area must be surrounded by a non-combustible material to prevent the spread of fire, i.e. stones, etc. The total fuel area cannot exceed 3 feet in diameter by 2 feet in height.

### Portable outdoor fireplace (portable, solid-fuel burning)

### PERMIT NOT REQUIRED

Portable outdoor fireplaces are defined as a portable, outdoor, solid-fuel burning fireplace that is constructed of a noncombustible material. These devices may have a small hearth opening, a chimney, or be open in design. Portable, outdoor, solid-fuel burning devices shall be operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and be located a minimum of 15 feet from a structure or combustible material including buildings, decks, fences, etc. When operated at a one-and-two family dwelling the device must be operated in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and is not required to meet the 15 foot minimum requirement. Using these devices on a combustible surface is not recommended at any time.



**Examples:** Portable outdoor, solid-fuel burning devices include chimeneas, enclosed fire pits, fire pits on legs and other devices that are commercially manufactured and available to provide ambiance and warmth.

**Portable outdoor fireplace (portable, fuel-gas fired)**

**PERMIT NOT REQUIRED**

Portable, fuel-gas fired outdoor fireplaces are similar to the definition and use provided for portable outdoor solid-fuel burning fireplaces with the exception of type of fuel used. Based on the similar hazards and uses of the devices, the same distance, location and clearance requirements must be met. Portable, outdoor, fuel-gas fired outdoor fireplaces shall be operated in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions and be located a minimum of 15 feet from a structure or combustible material including buildings, decks, fences, etc. When operated at a one-and-two family dwelling the device must be operated in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions and is not required to meet the 15 foot minimum requirement. Using these devices on a combustible surface is not recommended at any time.



**Examples:** Portable outdoor, fuel-gas fired devices include fire features that are primarily fueled by portable propane tanks. These devices include fire pits, chimneys, outdoor fireplaces, fire tables, etc.

**Outdoor fire pit (fixed location, solid fuel burning)**

**PERMIT NOT REQUIRED**

Fixed location, outdoor fire pits that burn solid fuel (wood) must be enclosed in a pit constructed of noncombustible materials where the total fuel size does not exceed 3 feet in diameter and 2 feet in height. Outdoor fire pits that meet these requirements must be located a minimum of 15 feet from any structure or combustible material including decks, fences, etc. When installed at one-and-two family homes the minimum clearance from structures or combustible materials may be reduced to 10 feet.

**Examples:** Fixed location, outdoor fire pits that burn solid fuel (wood) are small fires fully enclosed in a noncombustible pit. These devices are included as part of many landscape and outdoor entertainment areas and do not include devices designed as outdoor fireplaces such as those that burn solid wood and are constructed with a burn box, chimney, flue, etc.



**Outdoor fireplace (fixed location, solid fuel burning)**

**BUILDING PERMIT REQUIRED**

Fixed location, outdoor fireplaces that burn solid fuel (wood) that include a burn box, chimney, flue, etc. must be in compliance with the Michigan Building Code (MBC), Michigan Residential Code (MRC), and the International Mechanical Code (IMC). All outdoor fireplaces require permits and approval by the Building Department.

**Examples:** Fixed location, outdoor fireplaces that burn solid fuel (wood) are permitted under the Michigan Building Code and require permits and inspections by the Building Department. These devices are constructed much like masonry fireplaces/chimneys in homes and must be permitted as an accessory structure.



**Outdoor fireplace or fire pit (fixed location, fuel-gas fired)** **BUILDING PERMIT REQUIRED**

Fixed location, outdoor fireplaces and fire pits that utilize natural gas supplied via permanent piping must be permitted and approved by the Northville Township Building Department. The design, construction and installation of these fuel-fired appliances shall be in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, the Michigan Building Code, the International Fuel Gas Code and the International Mechanical Code.



**Examples:** Fixed location, outdoor fireplaces and fire pits include both fireplaces and fire pits or fire features that utilize natural gas as their fuel source. These devices must be permitted and approved by the Building Department. These devices come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are used in many landscape and outdoor entrainment spaces.

**Prescribed burning** **PERMIT REQUIRED**

See **Prescribed Burning Regulations.**

**Patio heaters (portable outdoor gas-fired heating appliances)** **PERMIT NOT REQUIRED**

See **Patio Heater Regulations.**

**Outdoor grilling** **PERMIT NOT REQUIRED**

See **Outdoor Grilling Regulations.**

**Occupational use** **PERMIT NOT REQUIRED**

Occupational use fires include the burning of wood in a steel drum over which a supply of construction sand can be dumped and thawed. These types of fires must be enclosed in a noncombustible chamber such as a steel drum at all times. Occupational use fires must be kept at minimum of 15 feet from any structure or combustible material and follow-all of the above regulations.



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## Quick Reference Guide

### Outdoor fire guidelines by type

See the Definitions section for additional information, definitions and examples of outdoor fires.

Type	Fuel Type	Minimum Distance (ft.) <sup>1</sup> (multi-family housing, i.e. apartments, condominiums, townhouses)	Minimum Distance (ft.) <sup>1</sup> (1-and-2 family housing <sup>4</sup> )	Permit required
Bonfire	Wood	50 ft.	50 ft.	Yes
Recreational burn	Wood	25 ft.	25 ft.	No
Portable outdoor fireplace <sup>3</sup>	Wood	15 ft.	Follow manufacturer's instructions.	No
Portable outdoor fireplace <sup>3</sup>	Propane	15 ft.	Follow manufacturer's instructions.	No
Outdoor fire pit (fixed) <sup>2</sup> (Total fuel load less than 3' in diameter by 2' in height)	Wood	15 ft.	Follow manufacturer's instructions, but no less than 10 feet.	No
Outdoor fireplace (fixed) <sup>2</sup>	Wood	Contact Building Department. Must be installed per manufacturer's instructions, IFGC, IMC, IRC, and MBC.	Contact Building Department. Must be installed per manufacturer's instructions, IFGC, IMC, IRC, and MBC.	Yes. Building permit.
Outdoor fireplace or fire pit (fixed) <sup>2</sup>	Natural gas	Contact Building Department. Must be installed per manufacturer's instructions, IFGC, IMC, IRC, and MBC.	Contact Building Department. Must be installed per manufacturer's instructions, IFGC, IMC, IRC, and MBC.	Yes. Building permit.
Occupational fires	Wood	15 ft.	15 ft.	No
Prescribed burning	N/A	See Prescribed Burning Regulations.	See Prescribed Burning Regulations.	Yes
Patio heaters	Propane	See Patio Heater Regulations.	Follow manufacturer's instructions.	No
Outdoor grilling	Various	See Outdoor Grilling Regulations.	Follow manufacturer's instructions.	No

<sup>1</sup> Minimum distance means the distance from any structure or combustible material or construction including homes, decks, sheds, fences, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Fixed means nonportable; cannot easily be moved; permanent in nature.

<sup>3</sup> Portable outdoor fireplace must be commercially manufactured and include manufacturer's instructions.

<sup>4</sup> 1-and-2 family dwellings are defined as dwelling units consisting of one-and-two families only. Due to the hazards associated with the increased building size, the increased number of occupants, and anticipated fire travel any structure that exceeds two families (duplex) is considered to be a multifamily dwelling for the purposes of outdoor fires.