



Why Does MassDEP Prohibit Open Burning on “No Burn” Days?

Open burning pollutes the air and can make it difficult for people with respiratory problems to breathe. When the air is stagnant, open burning can create smoke and odor nuisances – and health risks – for nearby residents, particularly in populated areas. On “good air” days, existing pollution levels are low and air circulates well. During the “open burning season” (which runs from January 15 to May 1), open burning is allowed in Massachusetts only on days when BOTH air quality and fire safety conditions are acceptable. Local fire departments make decisions about fire safety, and MassDEP decides whether the air quality on each day is good enough to allow open burning.

What is MassDEP’s decision based on?

MassDEP’s Air Pollution Regulation (310 CMR 7.07) authorizes the Department to prohibit open burning on days when it may cause or contribute to a condition of air pollution. MassDEP develops a daily air quality forecast based on models and analyses from the National Weather Service, and on data from state and regional air quality monitors. In general, “no burn” announcements are issued when:

- The Air Quality Index for Massachusetts and nearby areas of upwind states is “moderate” or higher (fine particle concentrations are at or above 12 micrograms/cubic meter) early in the morning,
- The weather forecast is for light winds, which will not mix smoke from fires with cleaner air, allowing the smoke to linger over neighborhoods, and
- Air flow into Massachusetts is coming from the southwest, which draws in polluted air from urban areas south and west of Massachusetts and can raise pollution levels here.

In these conditions, smoke from open burning will add pollution to air that is already polluted, making a bad situation worse. Adults with respiratory conditions (e.g., asthma) and heart problems and children can be especially affected by air pollution.

MassDEP may prohibit open burning in specific fire districts or statewide, depending on the conditions on a particular day.

Where can I find information on air quality conditions in my area?

The MassDEP web site shows air quality forecasts and real-time pollution levels at all of the air monitors across the state that collect data continuously:

<http://public.dep.state.ma.us/MassAir/Pages/MapCurrent.aspx>

Who can I contact at MassDEP to get more information?

Call or email the Open Burning contact in the MassDEP regional office that covers your town (see <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/about/contacts/> for a list):

Northeast Region

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Western Region

Roberta Baker
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For More Information

- About open burning, visit:
<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/air/quality/open-burning-answers-to-your-burning-questions.html>
- About the Air Quality Index and the pollutants that MassDEP regulates, visit:
<http://public.dep.state.ma.us/MassAir/Pages/MapCurrent.aspx>

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