



FireSmart: Farm and Ranch Practices

Farmers face special burnings challenges. By practicing FireSmart farming practice, you can reduce the potential for a wildfire to start and limit the impact of a wildfire that threatens your property.

Tips to Ensure a Safe Burn

Burning grass and stubble, piles and windrows can be tricky for farmers. Below, we have provided some tips to ensure a safe burn:

Burning Windrows

- Make sure you have a permit. If you are in or within 4.5 kilometres of the provincial forest you require a burn notification number; if you are outside of this zone you may require a burning permit from your rural municipality.
- Avoid building windrows in muskeg areas where the fire can burn deep into the duff layer.
- Use a brush rake or excavator to build windrows when possible. This eliminates as much dirt from the rows as possible and encourages better burning.
- Pack the windrows as tight as possible.
- Build windrows across the direction of prevailing wind.
- Ensure that windrows are not longer than 60 metres.

- Ensure that all windrows are at least 25 metres from standing timber.
- Ensure that a minimum of 15 metres of bare mineral soil is created around all windrows.

Burning Grass and Stubble

- Get a burn notification number and always follow its conditions when burning grass and stubble.
- Avoid burning in the heat of day—when possible, burn in the evening.
- Never burn with winds greater than 12km per hour.
- Blade or plow a minimum of five metres around your burn, down to mineral soil. This makes a guard to help prevent the fire from spreading.
- Break larger fields down into smaller sections, with fire guards built around each section. This results in more manageable sized fires. Set only the fires that can be controlled at all times by available manpower and equipment.
- Ensure that you have adequate supervision, manpower, equipment and water nearby.
- Always burn from the outside perimeter, and against the wind.

- Never leave a burn unattended.
- After the burn is complete, continue to patrol until the fire is completely extinguished.

Burning Piles

- Once again, make sure you have a permit.
- Burn piles when there is snow cover and frozen ground conditions when possible.
- Never leave a burn unattended.
- Re-pile and re-burn if necessary until your pile is gone.
- Check piles for hotspots. Use a metal rod to probe the piles for hotspots. Hotspots may smolder long after the surface fire appears to be out and come back to life in the spring.
- Check your piles in March and April to make sure they are completely extinguished since brush piles can burn under the snow all winter!

Hay Fields and Pastureland

- Reduce dry grass and stubble to prevent a fire from escaping your property, or prevent a wildfire from coming into your yard.
- Cut the grass!
- Work up grain fields that are kept near or next to building sites. Make one or two passes around the yard before putting your tillage equipment away for the winter, and you'll go a long way in making your yard FireSmart.
- Cut hay fields next to your yard as late in the season as possible to minimize re-growth, or mow a strip next to the building site to act as a fire guard.
- Till around the outside perimeter of pastureland - this will create a fire break that could save your field from burning, or prevent a fire from spreading to your other fields.

Fence Lines and Ditches

- Manage the vegetation along fence lines and ditches leading up to your building sites, or to other values for at least 100 metres in all directions. This can be done by mowing these areas or mowing them once late in fall.
- Remember to check to ensure that all your corral lines are also free from vegetation that could wick fire into your fenced feed areas.

Feed Storage

- Make sure that hay is cured to the proper moisture content before baling.
- Store straw and hay bales a good distance from any structures to minimize spread of fire from bale to house and out-buildings.
- Maintain area between bales and buildings: this means minimum vegetation and keeping grass mown.
- Store your winter supply of bales in a couple of different locations to minimize loss in the event of a fire.
- Clean up all the old hay and straw that gathers in these storage areas from broken bales and bale bottoms freezing down over the winter. You can haul it out to the pasture for the livestock to pick through, if you wish.

Granaries, Barns, Outbuildings, Unused Land, Open Areas and Dugouts

- You can apply any of the vegetation management strategies to granaries, barns and outbuildings to reduce the threat from wildfire - livestock can also do a good job of cleaning up these areas for you if you cannot mow the grass.
- Remember to manage vegetation - this can include mowing, grazing, weed eating and treating with herbicide.

Livestock

- You should have an evacuation plan for your livestock if threatened by fire, and you should have insurance coverage for all farm resources including crops and livestock.
- Prepare and maintain fuel-reduced areas onto which stock can be moved and held during a fire.
- Use a plow or heavily grazed field with a minimum of grass or stubble. If possible, this field should be shaded and located well away from any forested areas and to the leeward side of your property. Water should be available.
- If you are unable to move livestock into a safer place, cut fences, turning the animals loose to take their chances with the fire - as long as there is no danger to people or vehicular traffic.