



IOWA COLONY FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

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Recommendation: Outdoor Burning Restrictions and Safety Requirements

Purpose

This recommendation proposes a revision to local outdoor burning practices to enhance public safety, prevent wildfire risks, and ensure responsible land management. The policy establishes stricter guidelines for when and where outdoor burning may occur, with a focus on property size, site safety, and permit oversight.

Background and Concerns

Outdoor burning remains a common practice in rural and semi-rural areas for disposing of brush, vegetation, and organic debris. However, burning on small parcels of land—especially in or near densely populated areas—poses significant dangers, including:

- Fire escape risk due to limited buffer zones
- Proximity to homes, businesses, and other combustible structures
- Lack of sufficient space for fire control and suppression access
- Increased exposure to smoke inhalation hazards for nearby residents

A property size of 3 acres or less does not provide enough distance between the burn area and surrounding structures or neighboring properties to ensure a safe and controlled burn environment. Even a momentary shift in wind direction or speed can lead to dangerous fire spread in such areas.

Proposal

1. Minimum Acreage Requirement

- Outdoor burning shall be permitted only on properties of 5 acres or more.
- Properties under 5 acres are considered high-risk and shall be ineligible for routine open burning, except in emergency or special use scenarios approved by the fire marshal.

2. Permit Requirement

- All property owners wishing to conduct a burn must apply for a permit at least 48 hours in advance.
- The permit application must include:
 - Exact location of the burn site (with map or sketch if available)
 - Type and quantity of materials to be burned
 - Intended burn date and time
- Permits are valid only for one burn event and expire within 72 hours of issuance.

3. Pre-Burn Safety Inspection

Before the permit is approved, the Fire Marshal or an authorized designee shall conduct an on-site inspection to assess:

- Distance from all combustibles, including structures, fences, vehicles, utility poles, and vegetation
- Clearance area: Minimum 150-foot radius of cleared space around burn pile
- Wind speed and direction:
 - Winds must be between 6 mph and 23 mph
 - No burning is allowed if winds are expected to shift erratically
- Fire control capabilities, including:
 - Charged water hoses or sprayers
 - Shovels, rakes, or fire flappers
 - On-site tractor or plow to create firebreaks, if applicable

4. Burn Site Supervision and Operation Rules

- Burns must be conducted during daylight hours only and be attended at all times by a capable adult.
- Burn piles must not exceed 10 feet in diameter and 3 feet in height, unless otherwise approved.
- No accelerants (gasoline, diesel, lighter fluid, etc.) are allowed.
- Fires must be completely extinguished before the site is left unattended.
- A secondary suppression plan must be in place in case the fire spreads.
- At no time household trash and debris may be burned.

5. Additional Safety and Legal Provisions

- Burning must be at least 300 feet away from any sensitive receptors (homes, schools, businesses, public parks) unless express written consent is obtained.
- No burning is allowed during a county-issued burn ban or when a Red Flag Warning is in effect.
- The person conducting the burn is legally liable for any damages or injuries caused by the fire, regardless of compliance with these requirements.

Benefits

- Improves public safety by reducing the risk of fire spreading into populated areas
- Protects air quality and public health by limiting smoke exposure
- Supports responsible land management with oversight and accountability
- Ensures rapid response capacity through inspection and permitting coordination

Conclusion

Outdoor burning is a useful land management tool when conducted responsibly and safely. However, it must be carefully regulated in areas where population density, environmental factors, and limited acreage increase fire hazards. By setting a minimum acreage threshold of 5 acres, requiring no-cost permits, and enforcing pre-burn safety inspections, this policy strikes a balance between landowner needs and public safety.

