

Recreational Fires, Fire Pits, Chimineas, etc.

At single family dwellings (with the owner's permission), there are no special permits required in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the use of outdoor fire pits, cooking, or recreational fires; there are however, several requirements based on Department of Environmental Protection regulations (D.E.P.), the Massachusetts State Fire Laws & Codes (MGL Chapter 148 & 527 CMR), the 2009 International Fire Code (IFC) and the State Fire Marshal (SFM):

1. The fire must be small and manageable, no greater than 3 feet in diameter. By definition, a fire larger than 3 feet in diameter is no longer considered a cooking or recreational fire. (IFC)
2. All fires must be constantly attended by a competent person until extinguished. (IFC)
3. It is required to keep a fire extinguisher, garden hose, or water bucket available for quick extinguishment if necessary. (IFC)
4. Fires shall not be conducted within 75 feet of a structure or combustible materials. (DEP and SFM)
5. The fire pit should be placed on a flat, noncombustible surface. An area of 75 feet should be cleared around the fire pit in all directions, and clear of all dry vegetation and combustibles. Make sure the fire pit is placed away from other materials that could burn or catch fire, both overhead and to the sides such as building components, tree limbs, sheds, awnings, etc. (DEP and SFM)
6. Open fire pits and recreational fires ARE NOT INCINERATORS. The burning of trash, rubbish, painted or stained wood and construction debris is prohibited by D.E.P.
7. Do not cause a nuisance or health hazard to your neighbors. Never use wet or damp wood. This creates needless, irritating smoke. Always use dry seasoned wood, charcoal, or specialist fuel (e.g. wood burning briquettes). If the Haverhill Fire Department receives complaints from neighbors that the smoke or smell is bothersome, we will investigate, and if deemed necessary, you may be instructed to extinguish the fire. (MGL Chapter 148) & (527 CMR)
8. Never use an accelerant to light any fire. There have been many cases of people getting burned while trying to light a fire with a "small amount" of gasoline.
9. Environmental condition may also limit or exclude the use of a Recreational Fire such as bad air quality or a 4 or 5 Fire Danger classification day (sometime referred to as a "Red Flag" day). (DEP)

If you have any further questions related to the use of open fire pits and recreational fires, please call the Haverhill Fire Department – Fire Prevention Office to speak with one of the Fire Inspectors at 978-373-8460 during normal business hours or send a general email to HFD_inspections@haverhillfire.com.