

Burning following storm events

This guidance has been created to support individuals clearing vegetation after recent storm events. Its purpose is to promote safe burning practices that protect both those conducting the burn and the wider community.

We acknowledge that this has been a deeply distressing time for everyone affected. By following these safety recommendations, you can help prevent further harm or disruption during recovery efforts.

Safe Burn Pile Practices

- **Take Your Time:** Allow vegetation in the burn pile to fully dry out before lighting. This helps ensure a cleaner, more efficient burn.
- **Assess Conditions Before You Begin:** Review the “Prepare a Burn Pile” checklist. Make sure it’s safe to proceed under current conditions.
- **Always Check the Fire Danger Levels:** Visit checkitsalright.nz to confirm the current fire season status, restrictions, and whether a fire permit is required. Apply for permits before lighting any fire and always follow the advice provided.
- **Notify Your Neighbours:** Inform neighbouring property occupants ahead of time about the planned burn. Include expected duration and contact details for the person in charge, in case they have concerns.
- **Prepare Fire Control Equipment:** Ensure you have appropriate gear on hand to control and extinguish the fire—this might include:
 - A water hose or sprayer
 - A shovel and soil for smothering
 - Mechanical digger (if needed)
- **Personal Protective Gear is Essential:** For the safety of all involved, wear:
 - Enclosed footwear
 - Long pants and a long-sleeved shirt
 - Eye protection
- **Only Burn What You Can Manage:** Do not ignite more piles than you can safely monitor or extinguish if needed.
- **Stay Vigilant:** The fire must be supervised from ignition to complete extinguishment. Never leave it unattended.
- **In Case of Emergency:** If the fire gets out of control, call **111** immediately.
- **Keep the Fire Burning Efficiently:** Where it’s safe and practical to do so, regularly push unburnt material into the centre of the fire to promote airflow and a more complete burn. Be careful—this can pose injury risks and may cause sparks.
- **Fully Extinguish the Fire:** Before leaving, make sure the fire is entirely out. There should be no smouldering or re-ignition risk.
- **Need More Information?** Visit [Burn piles | Fire and Emergency New Zealand](https://burnpiles.fireandemergency.govt.nz) for detailed guidance.

Burn Pile Size & Location Guidelines

- **Keep Piles Manageable:** Only build burn piles as large as you can safely handle. You can create multiple smaller piles or add material gradually to a single pile as it burns down. Ideally, each pile should be no more than 3 meters in circumference to maintain control.
- **Maintain Safe Distances:** Ensure all burn material is located at least 30 meters away from trees, shelterbelts, buildings, and other structures.
- **Establish a Fire Break:** Create a 5-metre-wide clear zone around each burn pile, free of any flammable materials.
- **Position Heavy Material:** Place heavier debris in the centre of the pile to prevent it from falling out and to promote a more thorough, clean burn.
- **Limit Soil and Silt:** Avoid incorporating dirt or silt into the pile, as it reduces airflow and can cause the fire to smoulder rather than burn efficiently.
- **Avoid Power Lines:** Never position piles under or near overhead power lines—smoke can cause electrical arcing.
- **Keep Clear of Waterways:** Burn piles should not be established near creeks, streams, or any water bodies to protect water quality and local ecosystems.
- **Space Multiple Piles Appropriately:** If using more than one pile, keep them at least 20 meters apart to avoid accidental cross-ignition.
- **Avoid Peaty Soils:** Do not set burn piles on peat-based soil. Peat can ignite easily and smoulder underground for long periods, risking delayed flare-ups and environmental harm, including carbon emissions and soil damage.
- **Check Local Rules:** Always consult your regional council for specific regulations on what can and cannot be burned in your area.