

Tips for Fire Safety in the Outdoors

Be aware, prepare and douse the flames!

By Janelle Smith, Recreation.gov

The keys for staying fire safe outdoors is to prepare for whatever conditions you may encounter, be aware of your surroundings and build and extinguish fires properly.

Some fires have natural causes, but people cause an overwhelming number of brush, grass and forest fires. Most of these fires are accidental and are due to the careless disposal of hot embers, ash or cigarettes. Do your part to stay fire safe!

As a start, you can use [Smokey Bear's App](#) and watch this Smokey Bear video on how to properly build and extinguish a campfire.

Four Tips for Campfire Safety

You can also follow these simple steps:

1. **Pick Your Spot Wisely:** Use existing fire circles or pits if available. Do not build a fire in dry or windy conditions, especially if there are fire restrictions in place (check with local authorities). Build fires at least 15 feet away from tent walls, shrubs, or other flammable materials.
2. **Prepare Your Pit:** Choose a spot for your campfire that is downwind from your tent and gear, and protected from wind gusts. Clear a 10-foot-wide diameter area around your site, and make sure there are no limbs or branches hanging over your pit. Always circle the pit with rocks.
3. **Build A Campfire:** Once you have a prepared pit, you are ready to build the campfire. It is recommended to use three types of wood. Tinder, which is made of small twigs, dry leaves or grass, will get the fire started initially. Kindling, consisting of twigs smaller than one inch around, will help to light the larger pieces of wood. Fuel—the large pieces of wood—will provide the heat and sustained flames once the tinder and kindling are consumed.
4. **This is the most important step! EXTINGUISH THE FIRE:** Campers need to properly maintain and extinguish campfires when going to bed or leaving the area. If possible, let the campfire burn down to ashes. Pour water on the fire to drown all embers, not just the red ones. Once this is done, stir everything in the pit with a shovel and test for heat with the back of your hand.

Combating Forest Fires and Suppression

How does the nation combat fires? The [National Interagency Fire Center \(NIFC\)](#) in Boise, Idaho, is the nation's support and logistics center for wildland firefighting. NIFC is responsible for setting the National Preparedness Level. The preparedness level helps to assure that firefighting resources are ready to respond to new incidents. Fuel and weather conditions, fire activity and resource availability dictate the preparedness level.