

Is Your Backyard Fire Pit or Chiminea Legal?



With their glowing warmth and beautiful, dancing flames, it's easy to get caught up in the ambiance of a fire pit's glow; however, fire departments all over the country report an increase in calls related to this new craze. It's always important to keep fire dangers in mind and use your fire pit cautiously and

responsibly, but with our county's current drought conditions, it's especially important to be diligent. Read on to make sure you're in compliance with local ordinances, and that you're keeping your family safe around the backyard fire.

Fire departments all over the country report an increase in calls related to backyard fire pits.

Woodlake is in a "No Burn" section of Chesterfield County, meaning that open burning is not allowed at any time without a permit. That means you can't burn leaves or other yard debris, but what about your fire pit or chiminea?

According to the Chesterfield County Fire Marshal's Office, backyard "warming fires" are perfectly legal, as long as a few rules are followed:

- Burning must be for recreational, warming purposes only
- The pit and/or fire may be no larger than 3' X 2' (If your pit is larger, the fire must be kept to this size)
- Use only "clean" wood. Burning of any toxic materials is prohibited, including but not limited to: paper, used lumber or trade waste, impregnated or treated/painted wood, toxic or hazardous waste or their containers, building or demolition materials, household waste. In other words, burn only the same firewood you would use in your indoor fireplace.
- Keep adequate fire extinguishing equipment on hand to control or extinguish the fire should it start to spread or get out of control. Fires should be constantly attended by a competent person until it is extinguished and no longer smoldering.

Questions about campfires, warming fires and bonfires should be directed to the Chesterfield Fire Marshal's Office at firemarshal@chesterfield.gov or (804) 748-1426.

Permanent outdoor structures, such as fireplaces or in-ground fire pits must be approved by the ARB before construction. Call Brian Hoyle at 739-4344 for more information.

Fire Pit Safety

Position it safely

Place or build your fire pit at least 10 feet from structures and flammable items.

Put it on solid ground

Place a fire pit on a solid surface and in an open area, avoiding overhanging trees or rooflines. Never use a free-standing fire pit directly on your deck or other flammable surface. Experts recommend that you place it on a fire pit pad, stone slabs or bricks over the wood. A fire pit can then be used safely on top of these surfaces, as long as the fire-resistant materials extend at least 24 inches beyond the perimeter of the fire pit.

Don't place it in an enclosed area

Fumes from fire pits can be harmful without proper ventilation.

Keep an extinguisher handy

Always keep a fire extinguisher near your fire pit and know how to use it correctly. Use safety gloves when handling a hot fire pit.

Avoid using soft wood

Woods such as pine or cedar that pop will likely throw sparks. Use only hard, seasoned wood.

Never use lighter fluid

The National Fire Protection Association and the Consumer Product Safety Commission say pourable fuel can cause flash fires and burns when added to an already burning fire pit. Both organizations warn against using liquid fuel.

Man the flame

Never leave any fire unattended, especially if children are nearby.

Stay three feet from the heat

Establish a three-foot "kid-free zone" around your fire pit. Teach your children and their friends the rule, and always watch children who are near a fire.

Dress appropriately

Don't wear loose-fitting clothing or flammable fabrics such as nylon.

Cool it

Throwing water in a fire pit may not be enough to extinguish the flame completely. To be safe, let coals cool and gently pour water over them. Make sure the embers are completely extinguished before going indoors.

Dispose of ash properly

Do not clean out the coals or wood right away, but allow to cool first. Even if you think they're completely out, don't use plastic or paper bags. Buy a metal ash bucket at your local hardware store and use that to allow ash and embers to cool thoroughly.