

Prescribed Burning Code of Practice

This leaflet is a shorter version of the Prescribed Burning Code of Practice which the Department has produced in order to provide guidance to landowners who use controlled burning as a land management tool. Please read it and keep it as it may help to save lives and property.

The full version of the Code of Practice is on the Department's website at www.agriculture.gov.ie and provides more detailed information on the issues covered here. It is strongly recommended that you read the full version of the Code of Practice before considering a prescribed burn. Printed copies are also available on request from Forestry Division, (Policy Section), Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford (Lo-call number 1890 200 509).

What is prescribed burning?

The term prescribed or controlled burning is used to describe the planned and deliberate use of fire as a land management tool – for example, in some parts of the country, it has been the practice to burn off old vegetation to promote new grass growth and to improve upland grazing.

In planning a safe and effective controlled burn, you must bear the following points in mind:

Consider the total amount of land that needs to be burnt. Are there better alternatives to prescribed burning? For example, the burning of gorse/furze can accelerate their rate of spread and seed production. In this case, mechanised clearing or chemical treatment may be more effective.

Be aware of the Law

Under the Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended) it is illegal to burn growing vegetation on land not then cultivated, between 1st March and 31st August in any year. Landowners found guilty of illegal burning will be subject to fines or possible imprisonment. Penalties under the Department's Support Payments for Farmers (e.g. Single Payment, Disadvantaged Areas) may also be imposed.

There are other legal constraints that apply to controlled burning and you must be aware of these if you plan to burn, especially in order to avoid fines or possible imprisonment. For example, under the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended), if you intend burning within one mile of a forest which you do not own, you must notify your local Garda Station and the forest owner (who has the right to object by counter-notice) at least 7 days in advance in writing.

Your Burning Plan

If you have decided that controlled burning is warranted, careful planning, including consultation with all interested parties, agencies and neighbouring landowners is essential. Burning should only be carried out in accordance with a written burning plan. More information and a sample plan can be found in the full Code of Practice but the basic things that you must do before you burn are:

- **Know your Objective:** what do you want the fire to achieve - forage improvements, turbarry (bog) management, fuel vegetation load reduction?
- **Location Map:** Prepare a map showing the location of the area where burning will be performed in relation to surrounding lands, woodlands, dwellings etc. Show the desired boundaries of the fires and indicate the order in which they will be burnt. Show hazards and critical areas such as dwellings. Highlight any topographic features that could affect fire behaviour and potentially introduce a hazard, e.g. steep slopes or wind exposed sections. Indicate control lines, firebreaks, assembly points, water points, access tracks suitable for heavy fire fighting vehicles and tracks suited only to smaller vehicles. Note names and contact details of neighbouring landowners on the map.
- **Control lines:** Describe any special work that may be required to create firebreaks and machinery or materials required. Firebreaks must be 2.5 times the planned flame length. Typically, firebreaks for most moorland/bog types need to be at least 6 metres (about 20 feet) wide to reliably stop a fire under controlled burning conditions.
- **Fire free areas:** Describe and map all public roads, buildings and any other areas which fall under the definition of fire free areas. Do not burn on or in proximity to these areas and ensure these areas do not fall victim to the prescribed fire.
- **Suitable weather:** In what weather conditions will burning be carried out?
- **Smoke management:** What precautions need to be taken to avoid danger to users of public roads, airports, or to avoid general public nuisance and possible health risks in accordance with the Air Pollution Act, 1987?
- **Fire control:** Describe how each fire will be lit, how its spread will be controlled, and how the fire will be extinguished.
- **Equipment:** List the available equipment. Check that equipment is in working order and identify if spares are required. Ensure adequate supply of suitable protective clothing and equipment.
- **Personnel:** List the names, contact numbers and duties of all individuals involved in the burning. Ensure that all personnel are fully aware of what they are to do, and how to do it.
- **Health and Safety:** Describe safety procedures for burning activities.
- **Contingency plans:** What procedures must be followed in the event that a fire escapes control? Describe emergency procedures to be followed in the event of accident or injury to operatives or bystanders.
- **Communications:** List the contact numbers of all key personnel, neighbours and Fire Service etc.
- **Briefing:** Ensure that all personnel have copies of the map of planned fires for each day of the burning and that they understand the objectives, safety and emergency procedures.

DIAL BEFORE YOU BEGIN BURNING

REMEMBER – YOU MUST ALWAYS TELEPHONE THE **REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL CENTRE** BEFORE YOU BURN, STATING CLEARLY YOUR INTENTION TO CARRY OUT A CONTROLLED BURNING OPERATION, GIVING YOUR NAME, CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBER, THE EXACT LOCATION AND THE EXPECTED DURATION OF THE PLANNED OPERATION FOR THE DAY IN QUESTION.

The Regional Fire Control Centre can be contacted via the normal Emergency Services telephone numbers:

999 / 112

DIAL WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED BURNING

TELEPHONE AGAIN WHEN OPERATIONS ARE COMPLETED AND ALL FIRES ARE FULLY EXTINGUISHED

Consultation

Landowners intending to burn should also consult with their neighbours well in advance of burning. Consultation with neighbours and State agencies is central to any responsible burning operation. Neighbours and other interested parties (e.g Coillte) who may be affected should be informed of the intention to carry out burning activities. Consultation may also present opportunities for co-operation between landowners, and in some cases State agencies, particularly where burning on commonage is concerned. As well as giving due notice of intentions, it is an opportunity to reduce costs and risks through co-operative use of equipment and manpower and to the benefit of all parties involved.

Where Archaeological features are present, the National Monuments Division of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) should be informed and advice sought.

Within Designated Areas (Special Protection Areas – SPA's, Special Areas of Conservation - SAC's, Natural Heritage Areas - NHA's) the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) must be notified and Notifiable Action authorisation obtained.

Copies of the burning plan should be given to the Local Fire and Rescue Service, Coillte, Garda Station and National Parks and Wildlife Service, where applicable.

Insurance

Individuals intending to burn are strongly advised to discuss their intentions with their insurance providers and ensure that adequate insurance cover is in place for the operations involved. Employer's Liability insurance should be checked to see that it covers prescribed burning activity if employees or sub-contractors are likely to be involved in burning.

Illegal burning activity may invalidate insurance and leave the landowner or operatives open to personal liability claims.

Do not take the risk.

Safety, equipment and resources

Safety is central to operating responsible prescribed burning operations. Poorly managed operations or ignorance of safety measures will most likely lead to soil, wildlife and property damage or possible injury or death. Even in well-managed burns, accidents can occur. Before, during and after every burn, safety should be the foremost consideration.

Always ensure that fire personnel are adequately rested and hydrated before and during all controlled burning operations. Operatives should be equipped with suitable beaters that can be used to scrub and beat out the fire. Beaters can be made using a suitable handle with a rectangle of rubber conveyor belting securely attached at one end using coach bolts and broad washers. Beaters with long handles 3-4 metres (about 10-13 feet) long reduce heat exposure for those using them, however shorter handles of 2 metres (about 7 feet) make transport easier. Spare beaters must also be on hand in the event of breakage or in the event that extra personnel are required to maintain control of the fire.

Mechanised equipment should be in good working order, serviced and fit for purpose.

Before any burning is started a suitable water source must be secured and checked and monitored to ensure sufficient supply at the time of burning. There may be environmental constraints on some water bodies - if in doubt, consult with the relevant Local Authority, Inland Fisheries Ireland or National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Slurry tankers are ideal for water transport where terrain permits, but should be thoroughly clean of animal wastes and residues to prevent pollution. Fittings should be obtained to allow the attachment of a small diameter hose for rapid aimed delivery of water onto target areas.

LACES

LACES is a system used by fire-fighters to ensure crew safety and welfare when attending wildfire incidents. It can be readily adapted by those engaged in prescribed burning activities, to prevent and lessen the risk of mishaps to operators. It stands for:

LOOKOUT - ensure that a member of the burn team is assigned as a lookout

AWARENESS – all burn team members should be aware of any changes in conditions

COMMUNICATIONS – clear communications must be maintained between all parties concerned

ESCAPE – clearly defined escape routes should be identified in advance of the burn

SAFETY ZONES – fuel free safety zones must be identified and agreed upon prior to the burn

The material contained in these guidelines is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or other professional advice. Specific legal or other professional advice should be sought on any particular matter. Any and all information is subject to change without notice. No liability whatsoever is accepted by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine for any action taken in reliance on the information contained in these guidelines.

IF IN DOUBT, DO NOT BURN