



# ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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## **Residents Asked to Refrain from Open Burning During Pandemic** *Health, Emergency Services Encouraging Everyone to 'Be a Good Neighbor'*

**PITTSBURGH** – The departments of Health and Emergency Services have joined forces to ask residents to “be a good neighbor” and reduce the amount of smoke and air pollution they produce during the COVID-19 crisis.

In most county municipalities (not all so check your municipal ordinances), recreational burning of clean, dry wood in a 3' x 3' pile at least 15' from the property line is legal. However, officials are asking county residents to voluntarily refrain from recreational burning. The Health Department (ACHD) has observed an increase in legal recreational burning with some taking place for extended periods during the day.

Dr. Debra Bogen, Director of the Health Department, notes, “With more people at home due to the pandemic, we have seen a significant increase in recreational burning. The resulting smoke reduces local air quality and for our neighbors and friends with chronic diseases such as asthma or COPD, local burns can trigger the need for more medication, emergency medical visits, and deterioration of the chronic conditions. Please - I ask you all during this crisis to think about the health needs of your neighbors and refrain from all backyard burns.”

The COVID-19 pandemic poses threats to individuals with a history of heart or respiratory illness, and open burning adds to that burden. Smoke can increase an individual’s susceptibility to the virus and can also decrease a COVID-19 infected individual’s ability to fight the virus and worsen their symptoms. It can also result in non-COVID infected individuals having to seek medical attention during this crisis because of respiratory illness.

Both departments have received a significant number of complaints related to open burning. The Health Department (ACHD) has received twice the number of complaints as were received last year during this same time period. Many complaints have been related to trash burning which is prohibited in Allegheny County. While ACHD has inspectors that can respond to complaints, municipalities also have the authority to enforce the open burning rules and, in many cases, can respond more quickly to address the issue.

“Help us help you,” said Chief Matt Brown, Director of Allegheny County Emergency Services. “We are entering the Spring brush and wildfire season which adds to the threat of a controlled burn becoming an uncontrolled burn.”

Just like in other frontline careers, fire departments are adjusting operations to protect their members while still serving our communities. This includes steps to limit training activities, enforcing physical distancing when possible, closing fire stations to the public, and conducting evaluations of members for symptoms. The voluntary ban on burning can assist with those measures.

Particularly during dry and windy conditions, open burning can lead to brush and other types of fires. Firefighters responding to those emergencies are working close to each other, are using personal protective equipment (PPE) that could be reserved for other emergencies and could be responding to

other emergencies rather than one that could have be prevented if residents refrain from burning activities.

For more information on the county's Open Burning Regulations, visit <https://j.mp/2wFVzEU>.

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**County of Allegheny**

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