

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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IMPORTANT FIRE PIT SAFETY INFORMATION

SUFFOLK, Virginia (April 1, 2016) With the early spring weather we've been experiencing lately, Suffolk Fire & Rescue would like to remind our citizens about important information they should be aware of regarding fire safety and outdoor entertaining.

People have always been drawn to the sensory experience of gathering around a fire in the outdoors, and it's no surprise that the use of fire pits, chimineas and fire bowls has become more popular than ever. But maximum enjoyment of your outdoor fire requires some thought and special safety precautions.

Commercial fire pits, fire bowls and chimineas are considered recreational fires by City Code and do not require a permit. Only approved materials (firewood) may be burned, and the fire must be constantly attended until it is extinguished. Some method of extinguishment must be available (fire extinguisher, garden hose, etc.) for immediate utilization. Code also states these devices shall be used in accordance with manufacturer's instructions, and shall not be operated within 15 feet of a structure or combustible material. Some additional safety information is as follows:

- Outdoor fire pits should be planned away from objects that are made of flammable materials. This will dictate where you should have the fire pit.

Choose areas that are clean and clutter-free. Avoid areas with overhanging branches of a tree or any other thing that can get easily ignited.

- Always avoid having outdoor fire pits in enclosed areas. The fumes caused by fire pits can be harmful if the area does not have proper ventilation.
- While using outdoor fire pits, begin with a small fire. This will help you to understand many things such as the direction of the wind and the effect on the flame.
- Always keep the area around a fire pit clean. Maintain a considerable amount of distance away from the fire pit. Sparks that are spit out from the fire pit can hurt people or cause damage to objects. Furniture should also be placed away from the fire pit. To prevent sparks from flying out of the pit, use screens that can be kept over the flame. This prevents the wind from disturbing the flames as well.
- Do not allow children or animals near any outdoor fire pit.
- Once you have finished the use of the outdoor fire pits, make sure the fire is extinguished completely.

It is also important to note that the 4 p.m. Burn Law, which began February 15th and lasts through April 30th, also applies to the use of fire pits and chimineas.

This law prohibits burning before 4:00 p.m. if the fire is in, or within 300 feet of, woodland, brushland or fields containing dry grass or other flammable materials. After 4:00 p.m., winds usually calm down and the relative humidity levels are on the increase, both of which reduce the potential for a debris fire or any outdoor open air fire to escape your control.

A violation of this law is a Class 3 misdemeanor punishable by up to a \$500 fine. In addition to the criminal violation, those who allow a fire to escape are liable for the cost of suppressing the fire as well as any damage caused to others'

property. These devices are exempt from the "Summer Burn Ban" which will be in effect May 1st through September 30th.

For more information on how to protect yourself and your property, contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 757-514-4550.

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