

February 20, 2014

Bulletin 2014-001-FI

Open Air Fires

The purpose of the bulletin is to clarify the regulations pertaining to open air and outdoor area fires. These regulations are intended to meet the objectives of the Vancouver Fire By-law (VFBL) which are fire safety of persons, fire protection of buildings and facilities, and health of the public. The following are excerpts from the Vancouver Fire By-law No. 8191:

Subsection 2.4.5. Open Air and Outdoor Area Fires

2.4.5.1. Prohibition on open air or outdoor area fires

A person must not light or maintain a fire using any combustible material in the open air or in any outdoor area without first obtaining a permit from the Fire Chief. [See Appendix A]

2.4.5.2. Permit conditions for open air or outdoor area fires

- 1) As a condition of issuance of a permit under Sentence 2.4.5.1.(1), the Fire Chief may:
 - a) require a fire watch, and
 - b) specify what fire protection equipment must be on Site. [See Appendix A]

2.4.5.3. Exception for cooking food

- 1) Despite Sentence 2.4.5.3.(1), a person, on private property, may light or maintain a fire in the open air or in an outdoor area to cook food if that person contains the fire in a barbeque or other appliance specifically designed for such purpose and acceptable to the Fire Chief.

Appendix Notes:

A-2.4.5.1. Open Air Fires. Before a permit is issued for an open air fire, the applicant should consider measures in the prevention of fire spread. These include sufficient clear space between the fire and adjacent buildings, other combustibles and woodlands, size and height of the pile of combustibles to be burned, wind conditions, fire control measures such as hoses and water tanks and, if a receptacle is to be used, the design of the receptacle.

A-2.4.5.3. Barbeques. This By-law does not prohibit the use of propane barbeques on balconies, provided the fuel lines are maintained and the tanks are labelled by an approved agency, and are safety capped. Safety measures should be observed regarding clearances to underside of a neighbouring deck and other combustible surfaces, and adequate ventilation around the unit.

The following is how the above should be interpreted:

On Public Property

On a street or other public property, if and where the public agency allows open air fires, an open air fire is permitted in the Fire By-law provided:

1. a Fire Permit is first obtained from the Fire Chief, and
2. the fire is fuelled by only butane, propane, natural gas, gel fuel, charcoal or other commercially available clean-burning briquettes.

Burning of paper, wood, plastics, or other combustibles, where a substantial amount of smoke, noxious fumes, or flaming embers could be created, will not be permitted.

On a Vancouver beach or park, refer to the City of Vancouver website <http://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/beaches.aspx>. Under Park Board regulations, no fires are allowed at any time at a park or beach, except for barbecues in containers. At a beach, no barbecues are allowed on the sandy beach areas. A barbecue must be 75 cm from the ground and full clean up afterwards is required; coals must be doused with cold water and removed, and if there is an extreme fire warning charcoal cannot be used (propane only).

Where the Park Board has granted an exemption for an open air fire, a permit from the Fire Chief will be required (see On Private Property (permit required) below).

The Fire Chief may refuse to issue a Fire Permit that in the opinion of the Fire Chief would involve an activity endangering life or property. [VFBL Clause 8.1.3.1.(1)(e)]

On Private Property (permit required)

On private property, an open air fire is allowed in the Fire By-law provided all of the following conditions are met:

1. a gas permit is obtained from the Chief Plumbing and Gas inspector for any fixed natural gas installation,
2. a gas permit is obtained from the BC Safety Authority for any fixed propane gas installation,
3. a Fire Permit is obtained from the Fire Chief, and
4. the fire is fuelled by only butane, propane, natural gas, gel fuel, charcoal or other commercially available clean-burning briquettes.

Burning of paper, wood, plastics, or other combustibles, where a substantial amount of smoke, noxious fumes, or flaming embers could be created, will not be permitted.

The Fire Chief may refuse to issue a Fire Permit that in the opinion of the Fire Chief would involve an activity endangering life or property. [VFBL Clause 8.1.3.1.(1)(e)]

Examples of acceptable open air fires with a Fire Permit:

- "Tiki" torch
- Fixed gas burning patio heater that produces an open flame
- Fixed decorative fire bowl or fireplace that burn propane or natural gas
- Portable gas burning patio heater that produces an open flame

On Private Property (permit not required)

On private property, an open air fire is allowed without a Fire Permit provided all of the following conditions are met:

1. the fire is used for cooking food,
2. the fire is contained in an approved (CSA, for example) outdoor cooking appliance, or outdoor fireplace,
3. the fire is fuelled by only butane, propane, natural gas, gel fuel, charcoal or other commercially available clean-burning briquettes, and
4. clearance to combustibles is maintained in accordance with the appliance manufacturer's specification, or in the absence of such specification 3 m.

Burning of paper, wood, or other combustibles is not acceptable to the Fire Chief. The burning of these materials create a substantial amount of smoke, noxious fumes, or flaming embers and thus do not meet the fire protection and health objectives of the Fire By-law.

Examples of acceptable open air fires without a Fire Permit on private property:

- Portable decorative fire bowl or fireplace that burns propane to produce a fire used for cooking food
- Natural gas-fuelled barbecue grill
- Portable propane camping stove
- Portable hibachi barbecue burning charcoal

Unacceptable Open Air Fires

Examples of unacceptable open air fires on public or private property:

- Chimineas burning wood
- Sky lantern (small hot air balloon made of paper with an opening at the bottom where a small fire is suspended)
- Fire pit burning wood
- Burn barrel burning paper or wood

Fire Permit Requirements

In the application for a Fire Permit, plans are to be submitted to show sufficient clear space to combustibles, design of the receptacle or appliance to be used, fire protection equipment to be provided on site, and other information as required by the Fire Chief.

Signed,

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John McKearney,
Fire Chief