

March 14, 2024

## **DEC Reminds New Yorkers: Annual Residential Brush Burning Prohibition Starts March 16**

Spring Burn Ban Reduces Wildfire Risks,  
Protects Lives and Property

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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos today reminded New Yorkers of the start of the annual statewide ban prohibiting residential brush burning. Since 2009, DEC enforces the annual brush burning ban from March 16 through May 14 to prevent wildfires and protect communities during heightened conditions for wildfires.

“Last month, DEC encouraged everyone to be extra vigilant when burning brush because of the risk for wildfires caused by early dry conditions, but starting this Saturday, March 16, it will be illegal to burn brush for the next two months,” **Commissioner Seggos said.** “Due

to the drier and warmer winter, New York State is at a greater risk for wildfires this spring. This ban is essential to protecting communities and natural resources, as well as the Rangers and other firefighters called to extinguish the wildfires.”

Even though some areas of the state remain blanketed in snow, warming temperatures can quickly cause wildfire conditions to arise. Open burning of debris is the single-largest cause of spring wildfires in New York State. When temperatures warm and the past fall's debris and leaves dry out, wildfires can start and spread easily, further fueled by winds and a lack of green vegetation. Each year, DEC Forest Rangers extinguish dozens of wildfires that burn hundreds of acres. In addition, local fire departments, many of which are staffed by volunteers, all too often have to leave their jobs and families to respond to wildfires caused by illegal debris fires. DEC's [Fire Danger Map for the 2024 fire season](https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires/fire-danger-map) <<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires/fire-danger-map>> displays each region's potential fire risk.

New York first enacted strict restrictions on open burning in 2009 to help prevent wildfires and reduce air pollution. The regulations allow residential brush fires in towns with fewer than 20,000 residents during most of the year, but prohibit such burning in spring when most wildfires occur. Backyard fire pits and campfires less than three feet in height and four feet in length, width, or diameter are allowed, as are small cooking fires. Only charcoal or dry, clean, untreated, or unpainted wood can be burned. People should never leave these fires unattended and must extinguish them. Burning garbage or leaves is prohibited year-round in New York State. For more information about fire safety and prevention, go to DEC's [FIREWISE New York](https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires/firewise-new-york) <<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires/firewise-new-york>> webpage.

Some towns, primarily in and around the Adirondack and Catskill parks, are designated "fire towns." Open burning is prohibited year-round in these municipalities unless an individual or group has a permit from DEC. To find out whether a municipality is a designated fire town or to obtain a permit, contact the appropriate DEC regional office. A [list of regional offices](https://dec.ny.gov/about/contact-us/map-of-dec-offices) <<https://dec.ny.gov/about/contact-us/map-of-dec-offices>> is available on DEC's website.

Forest Rangers, DEC Environmental Conservation Police Officers (ECOs), and local authorities enforce the burn ban. Violators of the State's open burning regulation are subject to criminal and civil enforcement actions, with a minimum fine of \$500 for a first offense. For search and rescue, reporting a wildfire or illegal activity on state lands and easements, call 1-833-NYS-RANGERS (1-833-697-7264). To report environmental law violations, call 1-844-DEC-ECOs (1-844-332-3267).