

Frequently Asked Questions about Wildfires

When do most wildfires occur in Michigan?

Unlike Western states, Michigan's busiest fire season occurs in the spring before new green grass comes up and the trees have not sprouted their foliage. The dead leaves and grass ignite easily and the typical weather pattern of windy days and low humidity creates an environment where fires start easily and spread rapidly.

How many wildfires occur every year in Michigan?

Each year fire departments respond to between 10,000 and 12,000 wildfires. These fires typically burn thousands of acres, and millions of dollars are spent on suppression costs and replacing destroyed property.

What is the number-one cause of wildfires in Michigan?

Burning debris, such as grass, leaves, brush and trash cause the most wildfires. Yard clean-up chores, when mixed with dry, warm, windy weather, result in about one-third of all wildfires each year.

What is a wildfire?

Any fire burning out of control in natural vegetation. That includes all vegetation--grass, weeds, crops, brush or forests.

How can you report someone that intentionally sets a wildfire?

Call Michigan's toll-free arson hotline: 800-44-ARSON. The caller will remain confidential, and a reward may be paid.

Is a lid required over a burn barrel?

Yes. Although ventilation is necessary for combustion, ventilation holes in the lid should not be larger than 3/4-inch. There also should be 3/4-inch holes in the sides and bottom of the burn barrel to provide adequate ventilation.

When do I need a burning permit?

A burn permit is required any time the ground is not snow covered. Recreational camp and cooking fires are exempt but still require the same degree of caution as any other outdoor fire.

Where do I go to get a burning permit?

In the Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula, permits are issued by the state Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service. In southern Michigan, permits are issued by local fire departments and other units of government.

What is the penalty for allowing a fire to escape?

It is a misdemeanor punishable by a fine and/or 90 days in jail plus costs and damages. Willfully setting a wildfire is arson, and is a felony punishable by a \$10,000 fine and/or 10 years in jail.

How many times has a Michigan governor invoked the emergency proclamation on a statewide basis?

Twice, once by Governor George Romney in 1963, and by Governor James Blanchard in 1988. Ten years later, Governor John Engler invoked a limited proclamation in 39 counties of northern lower Michigan and the Upper Peninsula.