

Guidance for Outdoor Cooking and Recreational Fires Near Multi-Family Buildings

Montgomery County Division of Fire Prevention and Code Compliance would like to share with you the criteria for cooking outdoors and recreational fires near multi-family dwellings to ensure a safe and enjoyable outing. “Multi-family” is any building that has three or more separate living units. This includes garden-style apartments, mid and high-rise apartments, and some condos. Some apartment buildings have amenity areas with grilling or fire features on their rooftop; this is only permitted with written approval from the Department of Permitting Services.

Fire Attendant:

All outdoor cooking or recreational fires must be constantly attended by a responsible person at least 18 years of age until the fire is extinguished. A garden hose or other extinguishing equipment has to be nearby and readily available for use. A clear space free of ignitable materials not less than ten (10) feet in diameter shall be maintained around the fire. Grills or recreational fires cannot be used to burn trash or other combustible waste. If the fire department is contacted and determines your situation to be hazardous, the fire department will extinguish your fire.

Recreational Fires:

Recreational fires include campfires, fire bowls, chimineas, and in-ground fire pits. Recreational fires must be kept at least 25 feet away from any building. Any fire that is part of a special event such as a large gathering of people or is larger than three (3) feet across may require permits from the Division of Fire Prevention and Code Compliance and the Department of Environmental Protection. Fires are not permitted on Code Orange or Code Red Air Quality days. For [Special Event](#) permits, apply on the [DPS website](#) at least 30 business days prior to the event.

Outdoor Cooking:

Outdoor cooking includes any gas-fired, charcoal, or electric grill. All outdoor cooking must be done at least 20 feet away from any building. It is not permitted on balconies, under overhanging portions of buildings, or on roofs. Gas-fired, charcoal, and electric grills cannot be stored on balconies.

After the fire:

Dispose of all ashes in a safe manner. After 24 hours have passed, all left over hot ashes should be thoroughly dampened, cooled and stored in a metal can that is solely used for ash storage. Do not discard hot ashes in a compost pile, paper bag, cardboard box, or anything that is combustible. Be careful handling partially burned wood that may still be smoldering as it can cause serious burns.