6 campfire safety tips.



Whether you're throwing a few logs into the backyard firepit or camping in the northeast wilderness, make sure campfire safety is a priority. Knowing the right way to start and extinguish a campfire can make the difference between a cozy evening and a catastrophe. Follow these steps, and your only scary campfire stories will be the ones you tell while you're making s'mores.

Step 1: Make sure it's safe to make a fire.
Campfire safety begins before you even strike a match. First, make sure the place you've chosen allows campfires. If you are at a campground, these rules should be posted on signs or at a ranger station. In some areas, you may need a permit for a campfire.

Second, check for any weather conditions that would make a fire more dangerous. The National Weather Service issues a Red Flag Warning when high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds combine to increase the risk of wildfires. It's not against the law to have a campfire during a Red Flag Warning, but it's safest to avoid it.

Step 2: Find a safe spot.
Location, location, location. It's the first rule of real estate AND campfire safety. If you're at a campground, there will probably be existing fire rings or fire pits designated for this purpose, making the choice easy. If not, choose a spot in an area protected from the wind, with no overhanging branches, power lines or other hazards. If you're tent camping, make sure the fire is at least 15 feet away from your tent.

Step 3: Build your fire ring.
If you aren't using an existing fire ring, you'll need to build your own. First, clear an area 10 feet in

diameter of all leaves, grass and anything else flammable, right down to the dirt. Then dig a shallow pit (about 6 inches deep and 2 feet wide) in the center of the area for your campfire and surround it with a circle of large rocks. Pile the dirt around the inside edge of the ring. Keep your fire small – large bonfires aren't safe in camping areas.

Step 4: Start your fire.
Finally! Gather three kinds of materials to start your fire:

- Tinder – Dry leaves, small twigs, dry grass, dry needles
- Kindling – Dry sticks smaller than an inch in diameter
- Firewood – Larger, dry pieces of wood up to 10 inches in diameter

Start with the tinder and light it with a match (**never use lighter fluid or kerosene to start a campfire**). Next, add the kindling; and last, the firewood. Throw your match into the fire when you're done. Then break out the marshmallows!

Step 5: Stay safe around the fire.
Keep your distance from the flames, and don't wear clothing with flowy sleeves or dangling ties that could catch fire. Keep a bucket of water nearby, just in case the embers catch something on fire. Children should be closely supervised near a campfire. To help them stay safe, draw a line in the dirt about 4 feet away from the fire ring, all the way around, and tell them not to cross the line. **Never leave a campfire unattended.**

Step 6: Safely extinguish your campfire.
When it's time to go to your tent (or home), pour a bucket of water on the campfire, and stir the embers and ashes around. Then finish with a second bucket of water. The campfire should be cold before you leave. Follow Smokey Bear's advice: "If it's too hot to touch, it's too hot to leave!"

If your campfire is in a backyard firepit, follow these same safety rules. Firepits should be at least 10 feet away from your house (and any neighbors' houses). And to be extra safe, make sure you have the right homeowners insurance.