

CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



CONTACT:
Information Officer
(650) 477-0379

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CAL FIRE Announces Mandatory Residential Burn Permit Requirement for Residents in Unincorporated Areas of Santa Cruz County

The County of Santa Cruz and the CAL FIRE San Mateo–Santa Cruz Unit (CAL FIRE CZU) are announcing a significant policy change regarding backyard debris burning. **Effective December 1, 2025, all residents in unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County wishing to conduct residential backyard burning will be required to obtain a CAL FIRE Residential Burn Permit.** This new requirement standardizes burn regulations across the county, marking a departure from past practices. The CAL FIRE CZU Unit encourages residents to familiarize themselves with the new rules ahead of the transition to ensure compliance and public safety.

CAL FIRE CZU Prevention Bureau Chief Colby Simms says “This is a crucial step for fire safety across Santa Cruz County. We are focused on educating our communities to make this transition as smooth as possible. The good news is that we’ve made the permitting process much simpler and more convenient.”

In a major improvement for residents, the CAL FIRE Residential Burn Permit is now available to be applied for and received entirely online.

To obtain a permit, residents must visit [Burnpermit.fire.ca.gov](https://burnpermit.fire.ca.gov) and follow these simple steps:

1. On the homepage, select the “**Residential Burn Permit**” link near the bottom left.
2. Review the pertinent informational page, then use the drop-down box to select **Santa Cruz County** and click Next.
3. Enter the burn location address in the upper left of the Google Maps display and complete the prompted questions.
4. After confirming the location, fill out personal information, ensuring the **email address is correct**, as the approved permit will be sent there.
5. Watch the mandatory informational video (approximately two minutes long), electronically sign the document using a mouse cursor, and click submit.

The approved permit will be emailed to the applicant within minutes. Residents are required to print and retain a physical copy of the permit.

The permit approval confirms the applicant understands and accepts the responsibility for starting and controlling the fire. Residents must adhere to the following key safety rules when burning:

- **Physical Permit:** A physical copy of the permit must be present with you at the burn site at all times.
- **Attendance:** You are required to be in constant attendance of the burn pile until it is completely extinguished.
- **Materials:** Only dry, dead natural vegetation originating on the property may be burned. **Burning of trash, dimensional lumber, or similar materials is strictly prohibited.**
- **Size Limits:** Piles are not to exceed **4 feet by 4 feet** in size.
- **Safety Equipment:** A readily accessible water supply and hand tools (such as shovels) must be present at the burn site.
- **Extinguishment:** Burning is complete only when the pile is cold. The process requires soaking the area with water, sifting the ash and materials with a hand tool to expose hot spots, and reapplying water until there is no heat or smoke remaining.

CAL FIRE emphasizes that improper burning or failure to adhere to the permit terms may result in legal action by law enforcement. If a fire escapes control and spreads to adjacent property, the responsible party may also be subject to civil actions.

Residents are encouraged to apply for their permits and review this educational video by following this link [New Backyard Burning Rules in Santa Cruz County](#) or using the QR code below.

