



Department of Environmental Protection

One Winter Street Boston, MA 02108 • 617-292-5500

Disposal of Tree Debris from Specific Natural Disasters

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) advises that storm related tree debris be managed as follows:

1. Recycle for production of lumber, wood pellets, wood chips and mulch.
 - Pine trees (if intact) should be limbed and sold to a saw mill. Limbs should be chipped.
 - Hardwood tree trunks, depending on species, are even more valuable as saw logs than pine. If intact, limb and sell to a mill.
 - Hardwoods that can't be sold to a mill should be corded for firewood.
 - Wood that cannot be sent to a mill or cut into cordwood should be chipped. Chipped wood can be sent to wood-fired power plants as a fuel or used as ground cover and erosion control (local contractors should be contacted).

Note: The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) maintains a [Massachusetts Directory of Saw Mills and Dry Kilns](#).

2. Wood that cannot be cut or chipped immediately should be stored in a suitable central location and then chipped when a machine is available.

MassDEP views open burning as a last resort for disposal of tree debris, to be considered only after all other options have been pursued and ruled out. In addition, certain municipalities may not conduct any open burning pursuant to the Air Quality Regulations. (Note: Open burning is not permitted in Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, Medford, New Bedford, Newton, Somerville, Springfield, Waltham, Watertown, West Springfield and Worcester.)

Open burning can create significant air pollution because green or "wet" wood does not burn well. The air pollution problem is exacerbated when the burning is carried out during times of unfavorable atmospheric situations such as temperature inversions. Under such conditions, open burning can create smoke and odor nuisances and, more importantly, serious health risks for those with respiratory illnesses.

MassDEP recognizes that not all communities have access to all of the options listed above,

and that these communities may believe they have compelling, overriding situations that justify the use of open burning for cleanup. Municipalities wishing to pursue open burning must request approval to conduct open burning from their respective MassDEP regional offices. The request must explain why there is no option available for cleanup of forestry debris other than open burning, and describe the conditions under which the burning will occur. MassDEP will evaluate the request. If open burning is allowed, the following minimum conditions must be met:

- No alternative suitable method for reuse, recycling or disposal of the wood is reasonably available;
- The municipality must secure approval from the local fire chief;
- The proposed site for burning has an adequate buffer, e.g., at least one-quarter mile to one-half mile from residential areas;
- No more than one site per community will be used and the site is not located at or on a landfill (NOTE: short term storage at landfills may be allowed);
- Procedures are in place for starting the burning and maintaining good combustion to minimize smoke;
- There is a reasonable schedule under which the burning is to take place;
- Only tree debris (limbs, trunks, branches) will be burned. Under no circumstances will MassDEP allow tree stumps to be burned. In addition, no construction, demolition, building waste or other wastes may be burned under these guidelines;
- The tree debris to be burned is stacked in a manner that would allow the Fire Department to safely manage and control the fire should there be a problem with control of the fire, including separated stockpiles of material to be burned with adequate buffers to the location where the burning is taking place; and
- Burning will only take place under the following conditions:
 - a. During periods of good atmospheric ventilation*;
 - b. Without causing a nuisance;|
 - c. With smoke minimizing starters; and
 - d. Must be conducted between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. with the fire completely extinguished by 4:00 p.m.

*Note: During the period from November 1 to January 15, open burning will not generally be allowed because of poor atmospheric ventilation. Atmospheric stagnation and inversions are most frequent in the late fall and early winter, accompanied by the shortest daylight hours which combine to limit atmospheric mixing and dispersion of air contaminants resulting from open burning.

MassDEP may set additional conditions and restrictions on the open burning as it deems necessary to protect the public health and MassDEP may rescind approval if conditions of air pollution, including nuisance conditions, occur.

Important: Municipalities that obtain approval from MassDEP to burn trees and associated debris from a storm should call the MassDEP Emergency Open Burning Hotline at 617-556-1021 to ensure that weather and atmospheric conditions are favorable. Also note that woody debris generated within the Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) regulated areas in the Greater Worcester area and Boston/Brookline requires special handling under state and federal rules to protect against the spread of this damaging invasive insect. Learn more about the [Massachusetts Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication](#) program.