

Opinion: Be smart with campfires

By Olivia Rahman

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and other fire protection agencies need your help this wildfire season to protect our communities and the pristine beauty of Lake Tahoe from wildfire.

Illegal or unattended campfires in the basin cause over 90 percent of the wildfires here. Protecting lives, property, and our natural resources is something all citizens can help accomplish by learning about campfire regulations and restrictions before lighting a campfire.

Whether cooking, warming up, or just sitting and enjoying the crackle and glow of a campfire, safety is essential. In the greater Lake Tahoe area, campfires and charcoal barbecues are not allowed on beaches or in the forest outside of developed campsites and campfires are never allowed in the Desolation Wilderness. A valid campfire permit is required to have a campfire or propane/gas stove on any public land.

Before you light a campfire fire, here are a few things to consider:

Questions to ask before having a fire:

- Are there fire restrictions in effect?
- Is it too windy with red flag warning conditions?
- Is this an approved location for campfires?
- Is a propane/gas stove a possible campfire alternative?

- Is there enough water to put out the campfire?
- Is the area clear of flammable materials? (tents, overhanging branches, dry grass/leaves)
- Will there be a responsible adult awake and attending the fire at all times?

Putting out a campfire:

- Putting a campfire out takes a lot of water and stirring.
- Soak the fire with water making sure all embers, coals, and sticks are wet.
- Use a shovel, stir water and dirt into your campfire to make sure everything is wet.
- Feel for heat with the back of your hand near the surface; make sure everything is cold to the touch.
- If it is too hot to touch, then it is too hot to leave. Repeat steps 1, 2 and 3.

Be alert for careless activity that could cause a wildfire and report any suspicious activity to local officials. Create defensible space around your property and think before starting any activity that creates heat or can cause a spark. Finally, make sure your campfire is dead out. We can all make a difference in reducing human-caused fires during this season.

For more information about fire restrictions and how to obtain a campfire permit, call the Forest Supervisor's office in South Lake Tahoe at 530.543.2694, Monday through Friday from 8am-4:30pm.

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