



Prescribed Burns and Air Quality in the Bay Area

What is a prescribed burn?

A **prescribed burn** (or controlled burn) is a carefully planned fire that is intentionally set by trained fire professionals under specific conditions. It's a time-tested tool for reducing the buildup of dry vegetation (known as fuel) that can lead to larger, more dangerous wildfires.

Why are prescribed burns used?

- **Reduce wildfire risk:** Prescribed burns lower fuel loads, making it harder for wildfires to grow out of control.
- **Protect communities:** By preventing severe wildfires, prescribed burns help safeguard public health, property, and ecosystems.
- **Support healthy forests:** Fire plays a natural role in many Bay Area ecosystems. Controlled burns promote biodiversity and forest regeneration.

What about the smoke?

The Bay Area Air District recognizes community concerns about smoke. That's why:

- **Burns are planned with air quality in mind.** Prescribed fires are only approved on days when weather and wind conditions help minimize smoke at ground level.

- **Fires are carefully monitored.** These operations are conducted under strict safety and air quality guidelines, in close coordination with Cal Fire and local fire agencies.
- **Less smoke, more control.** Compared to wildfires, prescribed burns produce far less smoke and are easier to manage.

The Air District's Role

The Bay Area Air District:

- **Reviews and approves prescribed burn plans**
- **Monitors air quality conditions to determine burn days**
- **Works closely with fire officials** to reduce wildfire risk while protecting public health
- **Issues Air Quality Advisories** if smoke from a prescribed burn affects nearby communities

Looking Ahead

In the past decade, environmental conditions have increased the risk of wildfires, along with the associated smoke and unhealthy air. Prescribed burns are an important part of a larger wildfire resilience strategy to help **protect our air, our health, and our future.**

TO LEARN MORE:

Visit baaqmd.gov/openburninfo for updates, current air quality, and prescribed burn information.