



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

San Antonio Fire Department

Fire Prevention Division



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Fire Prevention Training Bulletin

Date: March 16, 2010

Topic: Open Burning and BBQ pits in Group R Occupancies

Purpose: Clarification of Code Requirements for BBQ pits and Open Burning

The City of San Antonio's adopted fire code is the *2009 International Fire Code* with local amendments. Over the years, changes have been made to the fire code requirements for open burning and code compliant safe distances for barbecue pits near combustible construction at apartment complexes. This training bulletin will hopefully clarify these code requirements so that company officers can provide clear and consistent direction to citizens when responding to "Unauthorized Burning" calls.

The following references are from the *2009 International Fire Code* and our San Antonio Fire Department local amendments.

308.1.4 Open-flame cooking devices. *Charcoal burners and other open-flame cooking devices shall not be operated on combustible balconies or within 10 feet (3048 mm) of combustible construction.*

Exceptions:

- 1. One- and two-family dwellings.*
- 2. LP-gas cooking devices having LP-gas container with a water capacity not greater than 2 1/2 pounds [nominal 1 pound (0.454 kg) LP-gas capacity].*

Note: Storage of Propane containers (such as those that are attached to barbecue pits) is not allowed on exterior balconies. Exception #2 above refers to small, one (1) lb. containers like the ones you would find on a camp stove or camp lantern.

308.5 Fire Hazard Prohibited. *In Group R, Division 1 & 2 occupancies, a person shall not construct, erect, install, maintain or use any incinerator or barbecue pit or grill or so burn any combustible material as to constitute or occasion a fire hazard by the use or burning thereof or as to endanger the life or property of any person thereof.*

The use or burning of any such devices under the following conditions shall constitute a fire hazard and is strictly prohibited:

- 1. Within ten (10) linear feet of any combustible surface, including but not limited to decks, porches, balconies, walls, or verandas.*
- 2. Beneath any balcony, porch, roof overhang, deck, or veranda.*

Previous code versions and amendments were in conflict as the amendments read five (5) feet while the code sections in the book read ten (10) feet as the "safe" distance. The newly adopted code corrects this discrepancy. The safe distance for the operation of BBQ pits is, per code, ten



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(10) feet from combustible construction or combustible surfaces. Their use is not allowed on combustible balconies or beneath any balcony, porch, deck, or overhang.

The 2009 International Fire Code (with local amendments) also addresses open burning:

Section 307.2.2 Burning Rubbish, Brush and Other Combustible Matter as listed in the local amendments to the International Fire Code reads as follows:

1. Unlawful to burn trash without permit. It shall be unlawful for any person to burn or cause to be burned, any trash, brush, tree limbs, grass, trees, leaves, paper, boards, planks, shavings, or any other combustible material whatsoever within the corporate limits of the city, without first having a permit therefore as required by subsection (2) of this section, unless the same is burned in an incinerator or container which has been approved in writing by the Fire Chief or his designee, and said incinerator or container when used for burning shall be so located that no smoke therefrom shall go into surrounding buildings, nor shall the operation of said incinerator or container create a fire hazard to the surrounding property.

Therefore, citizens may not burn without obtaining a permit unless the container or incinerator has been approved by the Fire Chief or his designee. Commercially sold wood burning devices designed for exterior heating such as outdoor fireplaces, fire bowls, "chimeneas", etc. are considered approved devices as long as trash is not being burned, smoke generated from these devices does not go into surrounding buildings, the device is not creating a fire hazard, and the screen (spark arrestor) is in place. There is some subjectivity in what constitutes a "fire hazard" even in an approved device. The device is not to be left unattended and some means of extinguishment (portable extinguisher, garden hose, etc) must be readily available.

Open burning in barbecue pits, like outdoor wood burning devices, is allowed for the intended use of cooking. Using a cooking device to burn trash is unlawful and strictly prohibited without a permit. The permit requirements, subsection (2), are not included in this bulletin.

Summary:

1. The code referenced safe distance for the operation of barbecue pits at apartments, condos, etc. is ten (10) feet from combustible surfaces or combustible construction.
2. Barbecue pits, incinerators, or other wood burning devices are not allowed to be used on combustible balconies or under any balcony, overhang, porch, deck, or veranda.
3. Open burning is prohibited unless a permit is obtained or it is done in an approved container. Even if an approved container is used, trash must not be burned, smoke generated must not go into surrounding buildings, nor shall the burning create a fire hazard.

Please direct any questions to the Fire Prevention Division at 210-207-8410