



NEWS RELEASE

York County Public Affairs
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Mulch Fires a Common Occurrence

York County Fire & Life Safety offers tips to avoid these common fires

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'Tis the season for mulching! At this time of year, it is especially common to see mulch being placed in yards, around other buildings, and even in landscape beds in medians. Mulch not only looks nice, but it's also a great way to conserve moisture and reduce weed growth. However, mulch fires can also occur and, in the last 12 months, York County Fire & Life Safety responded to 63 mulch fire incidents!



Mulch fires may be caused by spontaneous combustion when mulch is piled high and is allowed to remain for a long period of time. Primarily, this type of fire affects those who deal with large quantities of mulch such as commercial producers, landscapers, etc. But, mulch fires are also caused by the careless disposal of smoking materials, such as one that happened in Woodbridge, VA last year at a Chuck E. Cheese that damaged the structure necessitating its closure; and another that occurred in 2014 in Harrisonburg, VA at an apartment complex, displacing 21 people and causing \$250,000 in damages. In addition, each year, particularly during spring time or periods of low humidity and/or windy and dry conditions, fire departments are routinely dispatched to fires in medians along highways, to commercial properties with landscape fires, and structure fires that originated in adjacent mulched areas.

Here are some tips to help minimize the chance of a mulch fire and reduce the potential for damage if one occurs:

- Provide a minimum 18-inch clearance between landscaped mulch beds and combustible building materials.
- Recognize that when the weather is hot and there has been little to no rain for an extended time, mulch fires can start more readily.
- Regularly water mulch when the weather is hot and dry to keep it moist.
- If you see anything smoldering in a landscaped area, put it out if you can and report it to someone inside the building. If the burning material is not thoroughly wetted down or removed, it may reignite. **Always call 911!**
- Be aware of conditions that are favorable for mulch fires and increase surveillance of mulch beds in the afternoon when fires are more likely to occur.
- Designate outdoor smoking areas away from mulch beds and provide receptacles for smoking materials at all entrances.
- Do not discard cigarettes along roadways, in parking lots, or in mulch generally or in potted plants.
- Consider using metal cans with sand for outdoor lighted smoking material disposal.

- Provide proper clearance for electric devices such as decorative lights by following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Use only the manufacturer's recommended size/wattage for yard light bulbs.
- Use only electrical devices and cords listed for outdoor use, and follow the manufacturer's specifications.
- Consider replacing wood mulch with less combustible materials such as cocoa shells or decorative stone. NOTE: More fire-resistant wood mulches are coarse and chunky because they retain moisture longer.
- Use noncombustible mulch such as rock or pea gravel around the gas meter and next to the combustible portions of the structure.

Whether you are a home or business owner, please follow the steps above to lessen the danger and expense of a mulch fire on your property. For more information, call (757) 890-3600, Monday through Friday, 8:15 a.m. to 5 p.m.