

Preventing Mulch Fires



Did you know most mulch fires are started by people? Each year, Virginia's fire service responds to a growing number of fires caused by discarded smoking materials in landscaping mulch. These fires usually occur in landscaped areas around businesses, as well as single and multi-family dwellings.

According to the Virginia Fire Incident Reporting System, in 2005 Virginia experienced 625 light vegetation (not crop) fires that consisted of organic materials, such as grass, leaves, needles, chaff, mulch, and compost as a result of smoking materials. In 2006, there were 854 similar incidents, a 37 percent increase from the previous year.

"Mulch fires are particularly dangerous," said W.G. Billy Shelton, executive director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. "These types of incidents present a serious threat to life and property through the accelerated spread of fire to nearby structures, placing innocent lives at risk."

Improperly discarded smoking materials coupled with factors such as below average rainfall, and extremely dry conditions increase the risk of serious damage from mulch fires. Fortunately, this risk can be minimized if the public takes special precautions.

Do your part to prevent mulch fires by considering the following tips from the Virginia Department of Forestry:

If you smoke...

- Do not throw lit cigarettes, cigars, or pipe tobacco around areas that have been mulched.
- If you smoke, please use the provided receptacles to discard your smoking material and matches.

Ground Maintenance...

- Ground maintenance crews should be aware of the conditions that are favorable for mulch fires and increase surveillance of mulch beds in the afternoon when fires are more likely to occur.
- Provide proper receptacles for smoking materials at all entrances to public buildings and in designated smoking areas. Do not use mulch in or near these areas.
- Provide a minimum of an 18-inch clearance between landscaping mulch beds and combustible building materials. Ensure proper clearance to electric devices, such as decorative lights.
- Keep landscaping mulch beds moist if possible.
- Consider using crushed rocks or stones instead of mulch.

To everyone...

- If you see anything smoldering in a landscape bed, put it out if you can, or call 911.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF FIRE PROGRAMS

For more fire safety information visit us online at www.vafire.com