

# Burn Plans and Liability

## Why Have a Burn Plan?

Burn plans are not required for most private land small prescribed burns. Although not required, they are useful in several ways.

- They make sure your burn is safe and you get the results you want.
- Reduces your liability

Having even a simple one- or two-page burn plan shows “due diligence” and decreases your liability. Less than 1% of prescribed fires escape in California. And of these the majority are where the fire went a little beyond the control line and no damage was done. If you need to call CAL FIRE or the local fire department, even for a little fire over your control line, you are much less likely to be charged if you have shown due diligence and have a plan and followed that plan.

## Plan Types from Simple to Advanced

CAL FIRE has developed a burn plan template that is easy to fill out. But a burn plan can be even simpler than that. Here, we walk you through the process of completing a simple or a basic burn plan step by step. We have examples of different plans available at the end of this fact sheet and also on our website.

### *Types of Burn Plans*

TYPE of PLAN	Length	Description
Simple	1-2 pages	Includes landowner, address, purpose of the burn or objectives, and a simple map. Usually handwritten and drawn.
Basic	3-5 pages	Uses the California Prescribed Fire Template, filled in with basic information on location, landowner, objectives, description of the site (vegetation, slope steepness). A prescription, or the weather conditions that are safe to burn in and flame size you expect and can readily control. How you plan to burn (top to bottom), what water will be available, and how many people will be helping. A list of people that will be contacted before the burn including neighbors, fire department, air quality district.
Intermediate	10-15 pages	The same as basic but with more detail on the description of the site, the way you are going to burn the area and control the burn with water, and help.
Advanced	More than 15	The same as intermediate but with detailed fuel descriptions including the fuel model type, and fire behavior model predictions. Most often used by agencies or professional burn bosses for prescribed burns of 10 acres or more. Used for larger or more difficult/complex prescribed burns

## What kind of a plan do I really need?

You can burn legally without any plan at all. If it is permit-required season, CAL FIRE or other permitting fire agencies may require at the minimum a map with the address and location of the burn. In a permit, they will specify what prescription you will use, how many people you need to have and experience level, and the type and amount of pressurized water.

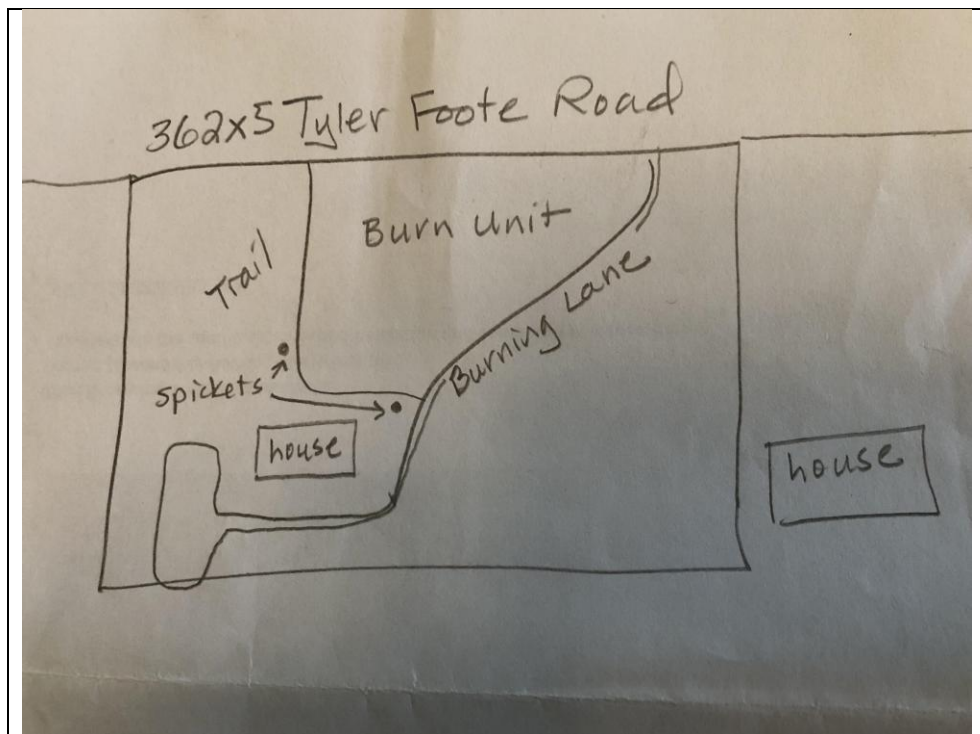
But whether you need one or not, it's a good idea to have even the most basic plan. This can take an hour or less for a simple plan or one to half a day for a basic plan. You can demonstrate that you have planned your burn in a way to make it safe and easily controlled. This limits your liability. Even a simple burn plan with objectives and a map helps the people volunteering know how to burn the way you want.

## How to Write a Simple Burn Plan

You can write a simple burn plan in less than an hour. Here are the steps and an example.

### 1. Draw a simple map.

- Include your name, the address at the top (and coordinates if you can).
- Show the roads that lead to the burn area.
- Sketch the general burn area location.
- Show where the house or other structures are.
- Draw where the water sources are.



2. Add your purpose for burning. (examples below)
  - Improve defensible space.
  - Make forest healthier.
  - Improve wildlife habitat.

*You can find an example of a simple, handwritten burn plan on the [ncrcd.org](http://ncrcd.org) website under *D-Designing a Burn. Burn Plans.**

**That's it! But if you want, you can add a little more.**




3. Key people to notify
  - Neighbors next door.
    - Include names and phone numbers. (they don't have to like burning but it is a good thing to let them know its going to happen).
  - Local fire district.
    - They like to know what is going on. And will be the first to see the smoke or get calls about the smoke.
  - Grass Valley Emergency Command Center (530-477-0641)
    - They want to know if you are burning a ¼ of an acre or more.
    - They like hearing from you. They'll see the smoke and get the calls.
4. Nearest hospital information.
  - Name, address and phone number.

### **How to Write a Basic Burn Plan**

The California Standardized Prescribed Fire Plan Template makes it fairly easy to write a basic burn plan. You just have to fill in the blanks. It's pretty long though and you don't need all of the items to make a good basic plan. The key ingredients are listed below.

1. Include everything in the simple burn plan.
  - Location, address, coordinates; name of landowner
  - Basic map.
  - Name of fire area with responsibility (usually CAL FIRE or Truckee Fire etc)
2. Describe the burn area, or site.
  - How steep it is
  - What are the main trees, shrubs and understory fuels there?

## Examples of Descriptions

<p><i>Open blue oak woodland over short annual grass. Recently grazed. Gentle, west-facing slope.</i></p>	 A photograph showing an open woodland area with scattered blue oak trees and a field of short, dry grass. The terrain appears to be a gentle slope.
<p><i>Mature pine and black oak forest with low growing (2' tall) kitkitdizzie shrub understory. West-facing ridgetop with gentle to moderate slopes (10 to 20%).</i></p>	 A photograph of a forest with tall pine and black oak trees. The ground is covered with low-growing shrubs, likely kitkitdizzie, and the forest is situated on a ridgetop.
<p><i>Mature red and white fir forest. Surface fuels are needles and scattered logs. Scattered small seedlings and trees but otherwise, no ladder fuels.</i></p>	 A photograph of a mature forest with tall, slender red and white fir trees. The ground is covered with needles and scattered logs, indicating a forest with low surface fuel loads.

### 3. List your goals and objectives.

- In addition, to general reasons for burning, add some specific objectives.
  - Reduce surface fuels by 50-80%.
  - Protect all large trees, especially pines and oaks, more than 20" diameter.
  - Kill more than 90% of cedar and fir seedlings.

### 4. Describe your prescription (safe weather conditions).

- What temperatures, windspeeds, and relative humidities will be safe to burn in?
  - Generally: 50-80 degrees, winds < 7 mph, humidity 25-50%.
- What flame size do you want, easily controlled.
  - Flames less than 2' tall.

<b>Prescription</b>	
<b>Temperature 40 – 80 degrees</b> <b>Relative Humidity 20-50%</b>	<b>Winds less than 7 miles per hour</b> <b>(eye level)</b>

5. What are you doing to get the unit ready? (Pre-treatment)
  - Ladder fuels cut and removed.
  - Large fuels (like logs or piles of sticks, tall shrubs) removed away from the control line (at least 10 feet away both inside and outside the burn unit).
  - Build a control line around the unit that will be free of all needles, leaves and other debris the day of the burn. Down to bare mineral soil, or a road.
6. What water do you have?
  - Total amount of water available: tank (gallons) or pond. Location near the burn?
  - Spigots (number and location?), amount of garden hose and nozzles and what kind of water pressure?
  - Portable tanks or backpack pumps?
7. How many people will you have helping?
  - How many are experienced? (they know how to put out a spot fire on their own).



8. What is your plan if something goes wrong?

- If you are prepared it shouldn't be a big deal.
- Hospital name, address and phone number.
- Ready to call 911- decided by the landowner or designated burn boss.

## Medical Plan

Property Address: xxx Burnme road. Grass Valley, CA 95945

Burn Unit Location: \_ 39.2xxx, - 120. 9xxx

Location to meet Medical Personnel: Driveway of 1xxx Burnme Road

Sheriff's Office Phone Number: 530-265-1471

Closest Medical Facility Name: Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital

Closest Medical Facility Address: 155 Glasson Way, Grass Valley, CA 95945

Closest Medical Facility Phone Number: 530-274-6000

Ambulance Response Time to Property: 19 min

Closest Helispot Location: Adjacent to Unit or other side of structures

Medical Equipment on Scene: First Aid Kit

Names of Medically Experienced Personnel on Scene: 1

## What else is good to include?

Go-no-go checklists are always useful to have in a burn plan, and especially on the day of the burn. Checking off all the boxes makes sure that you are completely ready to burn safely and legally!

The one that is used for many burn plans is on the next page.



### Prescribed Fire GO/NO-GO Checklist

* Preliminary Questions	YES	NO
A. Have conditions in or adjacent to the ignition unit changed, (for example: drought conditions or fuel loadings), which were not considered in the prescription development? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If <b>YES</b> go to Item B.</li> <li>• If <b>NO</b> proceed with the Go/NO-GO Checklist below,</li> </ul>		
B. Has the prescribed fire plan been reviewed and an amendment been approved; or has it been determined that no amendment is necessary? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If <b>YES</b>, proceed with the checklist below.</li> <li>• If <b>NO, STOP: Implementation is not allowed. An amendment is needed.</b></li> </ul>		
GO/NO-GO Checklist	YES	NO
Have ALL permits (CAL FIRE or Truckee Fire; air quality if required) and clearances (permissible burn day) been obtained?		
Have ALL the required notifications been made (neighbors, GVECC day of burn)?		
Have ALL the pre-burn considerations and preparation work identified in the prescribed fire plan been completed or addressed and checked?		
Have ALL required current and fire weather forecasts been obtained and are they favorable?		
Are ALL prescription conditions met?		
Are ALL smoke management specifications met?		
Are ALL planned personnel and equipment on-site, available and operational?		
Has the availability of contingency resources been checked and are they available?		
Have ALL personnel been briefed on the project objectives, their assignment, safety hazards, escape routes, and safety zones?		
If all the questions were answered " <b>YES</b> " proceed with a test fire. Document the current conditions, location and results. <b>If any questions were answered "NO", DO NOT proceed with the test fire: Implementation is not allowed.</b>		
After evaluating the test fire, in your judgment can the prescribed fire be carried out according to the prescribed fire plan and will it meet the planned objective? <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Circle: YES or NO</b></p>		

Landowner or Burn Boss Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

