

Campfire Safety

Because only *you* can prevent forest fires.

One of the best ways to relax at the end of an overnight hike is with a campfire. Fires can even be a new and fun way to cook when on the trail. Fully understanding your responsibility when building and maintaining a campfire is a must for any hiker.

✓ **Know your local fire regulations.**

As cozy as an evening around a campfire sounds, some parks do not allow fires due to the inherent dryness of a forest which would allow the rapid spread of a wildfire. Though this is increasingly common in the western United States, many parks on the East Coast prohibit fires during summer dry spells. Visit www.fs.fed.us to find out information about federal forests or www.nps.gov for info on national parks.

✓ **Use existing fire pits whenever possible.**

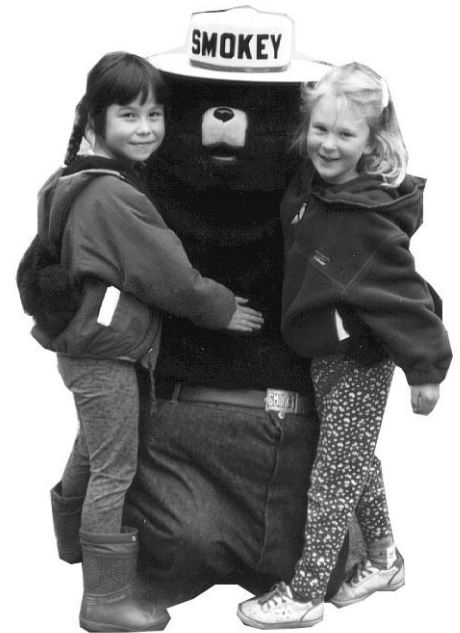
Since the dawn of man we have used fire, which means that there are heaps of fire pits around. There's usually no need to carve a chunk out of the forest by digging a new pit and extracting large surrounding rocks (which were probably being used by other woodland critters as a home) for a fire ring.

✓ **Keep the area free of flammable debris.**

Dry leaves and other loose materials on the forest floor provide easy kindling for stray embers or drifting sparks. Adding large clumps of pine straw to a roaring fire is dangerous since it combusts quickly and floats up on plumes of smoke. Keeping track of all those floating sparks is an unnecessary risk. Rocks in a fire ring are more than decoration; they provide protection against wind that might toss glowing sparks into the nearby forest.

✓ **Be mindful of your fuel.**

While some may have the luxury of toting in their own chopped wood, most will have to scrounge around for kindling. Only use dead branches and wood that has fallen onto the ground. There is never a need to cut down a new tree to fuel your fire. Be sure not to build a fire larger than one you can safely manage. Also, be aware that in some forests and parks it is not



permitted to bring in your own wood due to the danger of transporting tree-killing pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer.

✓ **Leave no trace.**

If there is no established fire ring to use and you still want to build a fire, Leave No Trace recommends laying a tarp or ground cloth out and covering it with 3-5 inches of soil from a source which was already disturbed, such as the root area of a toppled tree. Build a small fire on top of this soil. When completely extinguished, disperse the soil that is on top of the cloth.



✓ **Watch what you burn.**

It may be OK to burn some of your trash, such as bits of paper, however, one should never burn plastic or metal. Never leave a campfire unattended.

