

**Michelle Lujan Grisham**, Governor  
**Sarah Cottrell Propst**, Cabinet Secretary  
**Todd E. Leahy, JD, PhD**, Deputy Cabinet Secretary  
**Laura McCarthy**, State Forestry Division Director

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Contact:** Wendy Mason  
Wildfire Prevention and Communications Coordinator  
[wendy.mason@state.nm.us](mailto:wendy.mason@state.nm.us)  
505-476-3209

Susan Torres  
Public Information Officer, EMNRD  
[susan.torres@state.nm.us](mailto:susan.torres@state.nm.us)  
505-476-3226



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**New Mexico Forestry Division Reminds Residents to Properly Dispose of Ashes or Coals to Prevent Winter Wildfires**  
**Ongoing severe drought conditions a major concern**

**Santa Fe, NM** – The first day of winter is here, and more New Mexicans are using wood stoves and fireplaces to heat their homes. The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department’s (EMNRD) Forestry Division wants to remind residents to make fire safety a top priority when disposing of hot ashes or coals to prevent winter wildfires.

“New Mexico’s severe drought conditions are a major concern as it significantly increases the potential for a winter wildfire to devastate families and communities,” said State Forester Laura McCarthy. “It is essential that anyone using wood stoves, fireplaces, and fire pits take precautions and refrain from dumping hot coals or ashes on the ground. One small gust of wind can quickly carry hot embers to nearby vegetation and homes.”

According to the National Fire Safety Administration, approximately 193,000 residential fires spread beyond the source across the U.S., and six percent of those fires are caused by embers or ashes that were not left to cool or placed in unsafe containers. Ashes and coals from fires can remain hot enough to reignite for several days. So far this year, ten wildfires have been caused by improper disposal of hot ashes in New Mexico.

The following is recommended for proper disposal of hot coals or ashes:

- If possible, allow ashes to cool completely in your fireplace or wood stove for 2-3 days before removing them.
- Use a shovel to place ashes or coals in a metal can, slowly soak the ashes with water, then cover tightly with a metal lid.

- Keep the metal can outside, at least 10 feet away your home, and keep it clear from combustible materials.
- NEVER place other combustible materials in the container.
- DO NOT place hot coals or ashes in paper or plastic bags, cardboard boxes, plastic garbage cans or other combustible containers.
- ALWAYS use water and a shovel to churn and stir outdoor fire pits or campfires until they are cold to the touch.

Following these simple steps could help prevent unintended wildfires that threaten lives and property. For more wildfire prevention tips, go to <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/> and click on our [Fire Prevention Program tab](#).



*Iron Works Fire caused by hot ashes in March 2019, Valencia County*



*Example of hot coals in firepit*

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*The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.*

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us>