

# Outdoor Cooking Safety Tips

One of the greatest pleasures of spring and summer is eating and cooking outdoors with family and friends. The popularity of this activity is attested to by the large number and variety of outdoor cooking grills or “barbecues” in use and sold each year. However, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) found that gas and charcoal grills are responsible for 3,400 structure fires in or on home properties, resulting in a combined direct property loss of \$137 million. Gas-fueled grills caused an estimated 2,800 home structure fires and 4,400 home outdoor fires annually. Charcoal and other solid-fueled grills caused an estimated 600 home structure fires and 500 outdoor fires.

## Propane Grills

No propane barbecue grill should ever be ignited until the following steps are taken:

1. Read the manufacturer’s instructions and be sure you thoroughly understand them.
2. Check the propane tank hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will reveal escaping propane quickly by releasing bubbles.
3. If you determine your grill has a gas leak by smell or the soapy bubble test and there is no flame:
  - Turn off the propane tank and grill.
  - If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again.
  - If the leak does not stop, call the fire department. Dial 9-1-1.
4. Do not transport a propane tank in the trunk of a passenger vehicle. A filled tank should always be transported in an upright position on the floor of a vehicle with all windows open. Remove the tank from the vehicle as soon as possible.
5. Never leave a propane tank in a parked vehicle.
6. Do not overfill a propane tank.
7. Make sure that grease is not allowed to drip onto the gas fuel line or tank.
8. Never let children use a gas-fired barbecue.
9. Never use a gas-fired barbecue inside any structure.
10. Store propane tanks, including those attached to barbecues, outdoors in a shaded cool area out of direct sunlight.
11. When you are finished using your BBQ grill, make sure to turn off the grill burner and the propane tank.

## Charcoal Grills

Although charcoal may sound less dangerous than propane, it is just as necessary to take precautions when using charcoal barbecues.

1. Never use charcoal barbecues in an enclosed space. Burning charcoal emits carbon monoxide (CO) gas, which – even in small quantities – can cause injury or death.

2. Be careful when using a charcoal lighter fluid. Do not add fluid to an already lit fire because the flames can flashback up into the container and explode.
3. Use great caution in disposing of hot coals. Douse hot coals with plenty of water, and stir them to ensure that the fire is out. Never place ashes in plastic, paper, or wooden containers.

**The following are some barbecue safety tips recommended by the Terryville Fire Department:**

1. Propane and charcoal BBQ grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors, or in any enclosed space such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and the risk of exposing occupants to toxic gases and potential asphyxiation.
2. Position the grill well away from siding, deck railing, and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.
3. Place the grill a safe distance from lawn games, play areas, and foot traffic.
4. Keep children and pets from the grill area: declare a three-foot “safe zone” around the grill.
5. Put out several long-handled grilling tools to give the chef plenty of clearance from heat and flames when cooking.
6. When barbecuing do not wear loose clothing that might catch fire.
7. Never pour or squirt starter fluid onto an open flame. The flames can easily flashback along the fluid’s path to the container in your hands.
8. Never leave the grill unattended.
9. Purchase the proper charcoal lighter fluid and store it out of reach from children and away from heat sources.
10. Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have been ignited, and never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to get the fire going.
11. Keep your grill clean and free of grease buildup that may lead to a fire.
12. Never store liquid or pressurized fuels inside your home and/or near any possible source of flame.

**In Case of a Barbecue Grill Fire**

1. For Propane Grills – turn off the burners. For Charcoal Grills – close the grill lid. For Electric Grills – disconnect the power.
2. For Propane Grills – If you can safely reach the tank valve, shut it off.
3. If the fire involves the tank, leave it alone, evacuate the area and call the fire department. Dial 9-1-1.
4. Never attempt to extinguish a grease fire with water. It will only cause the flames to flare up. Use an approved portable fire extinguisher.

**HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY OUTDOOR COOKING SEASON!!!**

Submitted by Captain Tony Orsini, Terryville Fire Department Health & Safety Officer

Source: U.S. Fire Administration.