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# Open Air Burning Permit Process

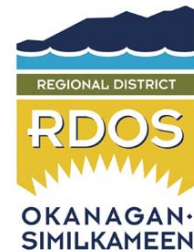
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Best Practices

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Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen

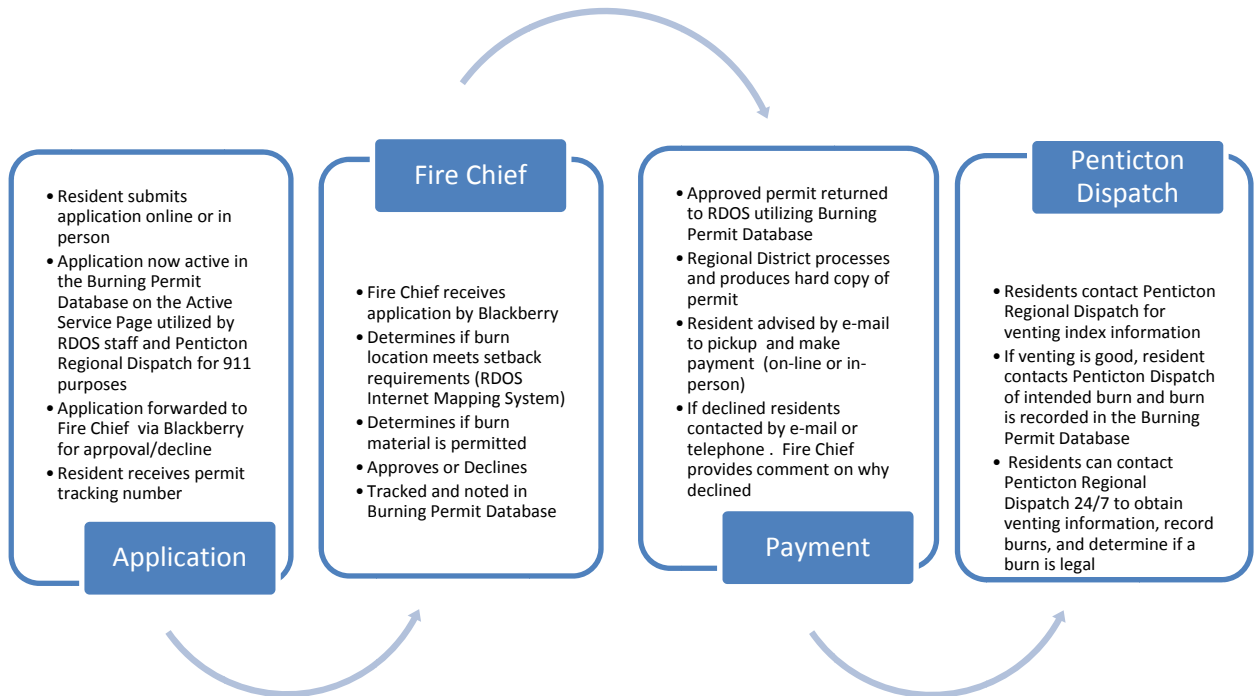
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**Summary**

In 2001 the Joint Fire Chiefs Committee identified that open air burning was a significant concern and requested the Regional District implement a region-wide bylaw. The Fire Chief's main concern was uncontrolled burns and the impact on air quality within the Okanagan-Similkameen valleys. In 2006 an Open Air Burning Bylaw was implemented to regulate burning, reduce emissions, and eliminate the burning of garbage. Although the bylaw was not region wide, five fire-protection areas within the Regional District supported implementing the bylaw. Prior to adopting the bylaw the Regional District identified the challenges and developed a process in which the desired outcome of obtaining a burning permit is achieved by residents with no problems and unforeseen complications. Regional District staff developed an efficient and effective method to accomplish the task for residents to obtain a burning permit. Evaluating the results have proven that the process is working for both internal and external users.

## Snapshot of the Burning Permit Process



## Challenges and Solutions

The initial challenges the Regional District identified is the large geographical area that residents would have to travel to submit an application, make payment, and obtain support or information. Additionally, Regional District office hours are not conducive to providing information and service assistance that may be required 24/7. To provide a seamless burning permit process it was identified that utilization of technology and engaging support from City of Penticton's Penticton Regional Fire Dispatch was crucial to the success of the service. Additional challenges were that not all fire protection areas had adequate broadband to utilize technology and for a number of reasons many Regional District residents do not use computer technology.

Although the burning permit process is managed utilizing computer technology, procedures have been put in place for residents who do use or are not able to use computers. Residents can make an application in person, by mail or fax. Once received Regional District staff enter the information online and communicate the status of applications to residents by phone or mail.

**Burning Permit Application**

The Burning Permit Application is designed to input, store and access all pertinent information related to a Burning Permit. (Sample Application on Page 7 & 8, and Permit on Page 9)

**Team Work and Consultation**

A team of Regional District Departments and the Volunteer Fire Departments contributed ideas and expertise in development the online burning permit process. Consultation determined what information each department would require throughout the process of any given permit. This was an iterative process where all parties were consulted, a product was created, the consultation occurred again, and the product was refined.

**Technology and Process**

Many different types of users need access to the information. The users have different needs and different technical abilities which change throughout the process of a Permit. The public and internal staff would be using desktop computers to access the web application to apply for permits and look at the status of permits. Fire Chiefs would be using Blackberries to read emails and access the web application. Every step of the process is recorded, via the web application, and stored in Structured Query Language (SQL) Server. This allows the Permit to be easily tracked (Tracking Search, Page 10)

Application for a permit is done via the Active Service Page (ASP) web application. The applicant fills out a web form and submits it online. Once the permit is submitted the ASP web application enters the information into the SQL Server database and automatically sends an email to the appropriate Fire Chief. The Fire Chief receives the email request on their Blackberry. The email has summary information of the permit and a hyperlink to the ASP web application. The Fire Chief clicks on the hyperlink and it takes them directly to a web page for the specific permit. Here they can review the information and click on a button to approve or decline the permit. This updates the record in SQL Server and automatically sends an email to the RDOS. The RDOS opens the web application and issues the permit. If the applicant entered an email address they are immediately notified by email that their permit has been approved and ready to pick up. If they didn't enter an email address the RDOS will phone them. The applicant then pays for the permit and picks it up. When the applicant is ready to burn they phone

Penticton Regional Fire Dispatch. Dispatch checks the venting for the day and if it's good allows the burn. Dispatch opens the web application and searches for the appropriate permit. The database can be searched by permit tracking number, phone number or applicant name. The date of the burn is recorded.

SQL Server is the central database used to store the information. ASPs are used for the public and internal web interface. MS Access with an ODBC connection to SQL Server is also used by internal staff so different departments can create, customize, and maintain reports independently (the paper permit).

Throughout the design process Information Services (IS) provided guidance and training to Fire Chiefs, Dispatch and internal staff. There were a number of problem solving opportunities that IS worked on throughout the development process. For example, each Blackberry needed to be updated to support Java, and email communication between the database server, mail server and Blackberry server had to be enabled. Each Fire Chief received training on how to open the email and access the web application. Dispatch received training on how to search for a permit and enter burn information.

### **Statistics**

Besides tracking individual permits, summary information can also be queried from the database. Once the data has been entered into the database every piece of information that is collected can be queried on from the material being burned, fire protection area, and property type. With the ASP web application as the front end internal staff can query the database for information on Permits. There is great power in the statistics that can be pulled out and can be used for budgeting, air quality concerns, etc. (Refer to Sample Report on Page 11)

### **Air Quality Department**

The burning permit process requires those applying for a burning permit to give details on what they are burning by checking off one of the categories. The categories are Full Tree Removal, Hillside, Pine Beetle Damage, Pruning over 8", Pruning under 8", or Yard Waste. The data is tallied at the end of the burning season and is valuable to the

RDOS Air Quality Program. The data is used to evaluate the roadblocks and success of the air quality and the solid waste programs that are providing alternatives to burning. The burning permit process has also assisted the RDOS Air Quality Program in that information sheets are distributed with each burning permit on the alternatives to burning, what not to burn, tips on how to burn to minimize pollution and on the smoke and health impacts.

### **Public Awareness and Accountability**

It was anticipated that the introduction of an open air burning bylaw would not be seen as a welcome service by all residents. To alleviate rural and agriculture residents anticipated disapproval of the burning regulations, the Regional District evaluated existing waste reduction programs and air quality initiatives to ensure residents were provided with alternatives to burning. A comprehensive education program was developed to introduce the open air burning regulations, the process to obtain a burning permit, and most importantly alternatives that are available to reduce or eliminate the need to burn. Information was distributed to residents through public service announcements, website notices, and inserts in utility billings and public notices in each participating fire protection area.

As part of the Air Quality Department's Environmental Protection and Outreach Program, radio advertisements and news releases related to air quality, health awareness, local and provincial regulation awareness were released. Although this program was not related to the open air burning permit process the increased awareness of burning and smoke hazards was seen as positive behaviour modifications. Additionally, during the implementation of the bylaw the Regional District was able to utilize a BC Conservation Corps member to provide public outreach which included monitoring and compliance. The member would conduct random inspections of burning practises to determine compliance levels and provide information on best management practises.

Overall the development of an online burning permit process was created to provide an uncomplicated tool for residents, RDOS, and Penticton Regional Dispatch. The overwhelming success is that during burning season Regional District, Volunteer Fire Departments, and Penticton Regional Dispatch workloads are not overly impacted and the resident is able to obtain a permit in a timely and efficient manner.

**Online Open Air Burning Permit Application**

Fill in the form below and hit the submit button. An email will be sent to the Fire Chief for consideration. Take note of the Tracking Number that is assigned to you. This number will allow you to track the progress of your permit application.

## Contact Information

Fields marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

First Name:\*

Last Name:\*

Please fill in property owner's name if not the same as above.\*

Owner's First Name:

Owner's Last Name:

Mailing Address:\*

City/Town:\*

Postal Code:\*

Phone 123-123-1234:\*

Alternative Phone:

Cell Phone:

Fax:

Email:\*

Property Type:\*

Development  Orchard  Other  Ranch  Residential  Vineyard

## Burn Information

Year:\*

Please select...



Fire Protection Area:\*

Please select...



Address of Burn Location:\*

What you are planning to burn:\*

- Full Tree Removal
- Hillsides
- Pine Beetle Damage
- Prunings over 8 inches diameter
- Prunings under 8 inches diameter
- Yard Waste
- Other
- I have read and understood the [Rules and Regulations.pdf](#)

Reset



**Open Air Burning Permit**

|                       |   |  |   |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| ID                    | 595   | Approved Comment                                   | Burn in pile only one pile at a time. NOTE -- Contact me before Burning Stumps in |
| Burning Permit ID     | 20080649  |  |   |
| Last Name             |   | Issued By  | Debbie Schulz   |
| First Name            |   | Issued Date  | 08/04/2008  |
| Owner Last Name       |   | Paid Date  | 10/04/2008  |
| Owner First Name      |   | Expired Date                                       | 31/12/2008  |
| Street Address        |   |  |   |
| City                  | Okanagan Falls, BC                              | Questions?   |   |
| Postal Code           | V0H 1R0   | Contact the Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen |   |
| Phone Number          |   | 101 Martin Street, Penticton                       |   |
| Alt Phone             |   | (250)492-0237 or 1(877)610-3737                    |   |
| Cell Phone            |   | or   |   |
| Fax                   |   | www.rdos.bc.ca                                     |   |
| Email                 |   |  |   |
| Primfolio             | 71402892.000                                    |  |   |
| Burn Location Address |   |  |   |
| Fire Protection Area  |   |  |   |
| Description           | Stumps/dry old lumber & pallets/untreated posts |  |   |

Open air burning is NOT permitted between April 15 and October 15. Further restrictions may be imposed depending on fire hazard conditions.

The venting Index is updated at 7:30 a.m. each day. Burning with a permit is allowed on days when the venting index for 4:00 p.m. is 'Good' (55 - 100). For better morning smoke dispersion the Ministry of Environment recommends start burn times: FALL 12:00 noon and SPRING 10:00 a.m. Conduct a test pile to ensure proper venting of smoke.

Call Penticton Regional Dispatch Centre at (250)490-2300 BEFORE burning to check the venting index and to report your burning permit identification number.

Residents must abide by the Regulations and Prohibitions outlined in Open Air Burning Bylaw 2364, 2005.

Any person who breaches these regulations and thereby causes the Regional District any direct or indirect expenses to remedy the breach shall, on demand by the Regional District, reimburse the Regional District for such expenses. Every person shall be liable, on conviction, to a penalty of not less than \$50.00 or more than \$2,000.00 for each offence.

For Office Use Only:

\_\_\_\_\_ Faxed to Local Fire Authority

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Signed (signature indicates acceptance and understanding of regulations)

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## Burning Permit Tracking Search

Search for your permit with your 8 digit Tracking Number. This will take you to a page to track the progress of your permit. If you have forgotten your permit number click on the link below.

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This page allows you to monitor the progress of your burning permit application.

-----General Information-----

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Tracking Number</b>          | 20080640                                |
| <b>Last Name</b>                |   |
| <b>First Name</b>               |   |
| <b>Owner's Last Name</b>        |   |
| <b>Owner's First Name</b>       |   |
| <b>Mailing Address</b>          |   |
| <b>City</b>                     | oliver, bc                              |
| <b>Postal Code</b>              |   |
| <b>Phone Number</b>             |   |
| <b>Alternative Phone Number</b> | ---                                     |
| <b>Cell Phone Number</b>        | ---                                     |
| <b>Fax</b>                      | ---                                     |
| <b>Email</b>                    |   |
| <b>Primfolio</b>                | 71407068.250                            |
| <b>Burn Location Address</b>    |   |
| <b>Fire Protection Area</b>     | Willowbrook                             |
| <b>Description</b>              | Full Tree Removal Hillside's Yard Waste |

-----Tracking Information-----

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Application Date (submitted to Fire Chief)</b>  | 3/25/2008 10:50:05 AM |
| <b>Approved Status (Approved or Declined)</b>  | Approved              |
| <b>Date Assessed by Fire Chief (Forwarded to RDOS)</b>   | 3/26/2008 6:21:51 PM  |
| <b>Fire Chief Comment (if any)</b>   | ---                   |
| <b>Date Issued (if approved applicant can come in to RDOS to pick up permit after this date)</b> | 3/27/2008             |
| <b>IssuedComment</b>   | ---                   |
| <b>Date Applicant Paid and Picked Up Permit.</b>   | 3/28/2008             |
| <b>Date Permit Expires</b>   | 12/31/2008            |
| <b>PropertyType</b>  | ---                   |

-----Burn Dates-----

| <b>Burn Session Start</b> | <b>Burn Session End</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 4/2/2008 12:00:00 AM      | 4/2/2008                |
| 4/3/2008 12:00:00 AM      | 4/3/2008                |

-----Comments/Warnings-----

No Incident Warnings.

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**Sample Database Report**

| <b>Month</b> | <b>Count Per Month</b> |
|--------------|------------------------|
| January      | 5                      |
| February     | 29                     |
| March        | 120                    |
| April        | 86                     |

| <b>Month</b> | <b>Fire Protection Area</b> | <b>Count Per Month</b> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| January      | Kaleden                     | 4                      |
| January      | OK Falls                    | 1                      |
| February     | Kaleden                     | 11                     |
| February     | Naramata                    | 7                      |
| February     | OK Falls                    | 9                      |
| February     | Willowbrook                 | 2                      |
| March        | Kaleden                     | 40                     |
| March        | Naramata                    | 27                     |
| March        | OK Falls                    | 31                     |
| March        | Willowbrook                 | 22                     |
| April        | Kaleden                     | 30                     |
| April        | Naramata                    | 16                     |
| April        | OK Falls                    | 21                     |
| April        | Willowbrook                 | 19                     |

| <b>FireProtectionArea</b> | <b>Total Count Per Fire Protection Area</b> |
|---------------------------|---|
| Kaleden                   | 85  |
| Naramata                  | 50  |
| OK Falls                  | 62  |
| Willowbrook               | 43  |

**Total Count for 2008**

240