

Board Bulletin, Volume 18 Fire Hazard Assessment

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Introduction

Logging and most other industrial activities on forested land can create or contribute to an existing fire hazard. In British Columbia, the *Wildfire Act* requires a person carrying out an industrial activity such as logging to assess and abate fire hazards.

A fire hazard assessment considers the risk of a fire starting, the hazard associated with the industrial activity, the difficulty in controlling a fire and the potential threat to values. A fire hazard assessment must also include an assessment of the fuel hazard, which is the potential behavior of a fire based on the arrangement, condition and amount of forest fuels such as branches, leaves and stems.

Why is fire hazard assessment important?

Assessing fire hazard is the law and therefore it must be done. But fire hazard assessment is also a critical step in demonstrating due diligence. Due diligence means taking all reasonable steps to comply with the law. Section 29 of the *Wildfire Act* states that a person may not be found to have contravened the Act if they can demonstrate due diligence. If a fire were to start on a cutblock and a licensee cannot demonstrate that it has assessed the fire hazard and abated any hazards identified, a contravention could prove difficult to defend.



For example, in 2012 a licensee in northwest BC chose not to assess or abate the fire hazard on its cutblocks. An arsonist started a fire that eventually burned two hectares. In 2014 the fire centre manager determined that "It is critical that persons conduct hazard assessments in a timely manner and abate known hazards before they can start or contribute to the spread of a wildfire." He levied a \$9500 penalty because the licensee did not comply with the fire hazard assessment and abatement requirements of the *Wildfire Act*.

Recent Board Audit Findings

As fire hazard assessments are legally required, Board auditors routinely ask to see them when they conduct compliance audits. In the past three years, Board audits found 16 licensees of all sizes that did not complete fire hazard assessments as required by the *Wildfire Act*.

Fourteen of the licensees abated the fire hazard by piling and burning slash as a standard practice. Even though the fire hazard was abated, the Board concluded that these licensees needed to improve their assessment practices to ensure they comply with the *Wildfire Act*. The remaining two licensees neither assessed nor abated the fire hazard and the Board concluded that they did not comply with the *Wildfire Act*.

Fire Hazard Assessment FAQs

When is a fire hazard assessment required?

A fire hazard assessment is required when carrying out an industrial activity such as land clearing or other prescribed activity¹ that is likely to create or increase a fire hazard within one kilometre of forest or grassland (*Wildfire Act* s.7), or when an official notifies a person carrying out an industrial activity that a fire hazard exists (*Wildfire Regulation* 11(1)(b)(ii)).

How often must fire hazard be assessed?

Every 3 months if the activity is inside or within two kilometres of a local government area or a regional district fire protection district (*Wildfire Regulation* 11(2)(a)).

Every 6 months for all other areas (*Wildfire Regulation* 11(3)).

If operations are going to be inactive for more than 3 or 6 months as applicable, a fire hazard assessment must be done at shutdown. "Qualified Holders"² may vary from these requirements if specified by a forest professional (*Wildfire Regulation* 11(3.1)).

What is required in a fire hazard assessment?

Fire hazard assessments must include an assessment of the fuel hazard and its associated risk of a fire starting or spreading (*Wildfire Regulation* 11(4)). Fuel hazard is the potential behavior of a fire based on the arrangement, condition and amount of forest fuels.

Where can I get information about fire hazard assessment?

The BC Wildfire Service's "[Guide to Fuel Hazard Assessment and Abatement in British Columbia](#)" is available on their website and is being updated in 2016.

Fire hazard assessment is one aspect of the practice of professional forestry, and the Association of BC Forest Professionals has provided guidance to its members. Guidelines for Fire and Fuel Management are available to members through its website www.abcfp.ca

Links to the *Wildfire Act* and *Wildfire Regulation* are available at <http://bcwildfire.ca/LegReg/>

What do Board auditors look for?

Auditors confirm that fire hazard assessments have been completed and documented when and where required. Auditors review assessments to ensure that they include an assessment of the fuel hazard and its associated risk of a fire starting or spreading.

If you have comments/questions on this bulletin, you can contact us at fpboard@gov.bc.ca, or on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).



¹ Section 11(1) of the *Wildfire Regulation* defines prescribed activities as operating a waste disposal site, dry land sort, a camp associated with an industrial activity, or an industrial activity that is likely to create or increase a fire hazard.

² A qualified holder is either: a party to a cost sharing agreement; or the holder of a forest licence, timber licence, tree farm licence, community forest agreement, woodlot licence or timber sale licence who has paid its annual rent.