Small Slash Pile Construction
and Burning Procedures

Slash piles should be constructed no larger than 6 feet in diameter and 5 feet in height. Piles stack the best if
green limbs and branches are used for the bottom layer. Keep the curvature of the branches in the same direction so
that they nest on top of one another. Piles eventually burn the best if the inner portion of the pile is dense, with little
void space. The outer portion of the pile can then be stacked with smaller dead material (as it does not nest as well as
green limbs), small trunks, and larger branches. Logs over 13-14” in diameter are hard to burn.

Adequate burning conditions are usually dictated by a snowfall of at least 2 inches, with several days of cold
weather forecasted. The South Dakota Wildland Fire Division requires a burn permit and will determine when safe
burning conditions exist.

Proper clothing is an important part of the burning process. Flame resistant clothing is recommended.
Synthetic fabrics are very flammable and will also melt easily. Wear boots that are waterproof and have good traction
as it gets very slippery. Clear safety glasses are a good idea to prevent injury and burns from embers. Heavyweight
leather gloves are a must.

Recommended tools to have on site are a shovel, a heavy-duty steel rake, and a hoe. A water source such as a
garden hose or water tank is recommended to be close by for use.

A fuel mixture is generally needed to get the piles to start burning adequately. It is recommended to mix 25%
gasoline with 75% diesel. This mixture will promote longer-term burning, as the diesel burns longer and less intensely
than gasoline. The mixture is also less likely to “flash”.

Burning Process

Once a person has an approved permit, notified their local dispatch center, obtained the proper clothing and
equipment, pile burning can begin.

After a pile appears to be burning well, a person can move on to the next pile to ignite it. It is recommended to
skip at least every other pile in an area to minimize heat intensity for the tree canopy and prevent snow melt. Once the
initial flame intensity has subsided, adjacent piles can be lit. Piles will readily burn, even if covered by several inches of
snow, as long as they have cured properly. Snow covered piles will create a great deal of smoke until the snow is
burned off.

The next step in the process is to tend the piles that have burned down to the point where unconsumed
material is left in the outer ring of the pile. This material should be moved into the center of the burning pile to ensure
that it is eventually consumed. Piles should be rechecked several times until all of the material is eventually consumed.
The last step is to rake the outer portion of the pile (and underlying ground litter such as pine needles and leaves) into
the center to ensure that there is no smoldering material left on the perimeter. Once a pile has burned down to this
point, it can be left for the night, if there was adequate snowfall. Burned piles should be checked and re-checked over
the next several day(s) until they are cold to the touch. Take extra caution and ensure that stump holes are cold to the
touch. Piles larger than 5’ x 5’ require significantly more tending as they increase in size, and may remain hot for weeks.
Piles that were thought to be out have ignited a wildfire weeks after initial ignition.

Refer to the Slash Pile Burning Instruction Video at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6ss_5eNABs&feature=youtu.be