

# Outdoor Grilling

## Introduction

One of the most enjoyable summer pastimes is cooking outdoors with family and friends. Nearly everyone would agree that a steak or burger cooked over the open-flame of an outdoor grill tastes better than one prepared indoors in a broiler or frying pan.

However, residents in multi-residential housing must take special precautions to enjoy the benefits of grilling outdoors. Using open-flame grills or other similar devices on balconies is unsafe and, in most cases, prohibited by local fire

ordinances. An open-flame grill can use gas, charcoal, wood or pellets as a fuel.

By taking a few simple precautions suggested in this guide, you could prevent a relaxing evening outdoors from turning into a fiery tragedy for you and your community.

For those of you who read no further, the most important suggestion is to cook with an electric grill. Electric grills burn almost

as hot as gas or charcoal, but are safer, cleaner, and lighter in weight.



## Safety Tips for Outdoor Grilling

**The following are general precautions for all outdoor grilling:**

- > Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory and follow all manufacturers' instructions regarding set up, operation, maintenance and clearance to combustibles.
- > Only use open-flame grills outdoors. If used in indoors, or in enclosed spaces, they pose both a fire and asphyxiation hazard.
- > Position grills well away from siding, deck rails and out from under building eaves and overhanging tree branches.
- > Place grills a safe distance from lawn games, play areas and foot traffic.
- > Keep children away from grill areas: declare a three-foot "safe zone" around the grill.
- > Use long-handled grilling utensils to minimize the potential for burns.
- > Periodically clean grease and fat build-up in catch pans beneath the grill so a hot grill cannot ignite it.
- > Keep a portable fire extinguisher near the grilling area.

## Need More Information?

Consult with your legal counsel to review business contracts, assess exposures and to offer advice as to the type and level of insurance protection required.

Associations may request additional information on this topic by contacting CAU's Loss Control Department.

## What are the Hazards?

Remember, in multi-residential housing, you are not alone. The risk of fire to one homeowner is a risk to all homeowners sharing the same and nearby buildings. Failure to take adequate precautions to prevent the spread of fire can result in injury or death to fellow residents, and a large lawsuit against you.

When you use an open-flame grill located too close to a building, such as on a balcony, there is always the danger of a fire getting out of control and spreading to living areas. In fact, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), one-half of all structure fires started by gas or charcoal grills begin on an exterior balcony or open porch.

The smoke produced during grilling can be harmful, even fatal, and you cannot control the direction that the wind will blow the smoke. Lethal smoke can build up inside your unit or your neighbor's unit without you ever knowing it.

These are the predominant reasons why, for multi-residential housing, most fire codes and local ordinances prohibit using open-flame gas or charcoal grills on balconies, beneath combustible overhangs or within 10 feet of the building. These same codes usually exclude one- and two-family dwellings from these prohibitions.

## Charcoal Grills

The following are general precautions for outdoor grilling with charcoal grills:

- Purchase the proper starting fluid and store it out of the reach of children.
- Never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to help ignite the charcoal.
- Never add additional charcoal starter fluid to ignited coals or instant light charcoal.
- If your bag of charcoal gets wet, leave it in a well-ventilated area outside the home. Charcoal can spontaneously ignite as it dries.
- Allow coals to cool at least 48 hours before disposing. Wrap cold ashes in heavy-duty aluminum foil and place them in a noncombustible container.

## Gas Grills

The following are general precautions for outdoor grilling with gas grills:

- Check the gas hose and couplings for leaks before using your grill for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to these areas will quickly reveal any leaking propane by forming small bubbles.
- Always turn off the gas supply at the bottle after cooking.
- If you smell gas while cooking, move away from the grill and call "911". Do not attempt to move the grill.
- Never store propane gas cylinders inside buildings or garages.

## Electric Grills

The following are general precautions for outdoor grilling with electric grills:

- Visually inspect the cord, plug and all connections for damage before operation.
- Only plug an electric grill into a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlet.
- Unplug the grill when it is not in use.
- Do not immerse the cord, plug or heating element in water or other liquid.
- Do not use an electric grill in the rain.

## Conclusion

Whether or not local fire codes or ordinances restrict the use of open-flame grills on balconies and near combustible building components in multi-residential housing, it is a good idea for the association to do so. The association should adopt a resolution that prohibits grilling with gas, charcoal or wood grills on or beneath elevated decks, balconies and roof decks. The resolution should also restrict grilling with these devices to grade level at least 10 feet from the building.

A safer alternative to conventional open flame grills is the electric grill. Local fire codes and ordinances will usually allow the use of electric grills on balconies in multi-residential housing, however, verify this with the local municipality before permitting them on the balconies.