WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES
DAVE UPTHEGROVE | COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

Fire Safety and Dispersed Target Shooting

(as of August 2025)

Every year recreational target shooting causes wildfires on DNR-managed lands in Washington. In almost every case, these fires would have been prevented if the shooters had exercised common sense and observed simple safety precautions.

Wildfires are dangerous, expensive, and destroy valuable natural resources. DNR has been forced to close several popular dispersed shooting locations due to the frequency of shooting-caused wildfires. It is the responsibility of all target shooters to observe basic fire safety protocols. Shooters should be aware that DNR is legally required to investigate all fire incidents, and individuals may be held responsible for the costs associated with firefighting response. Fires caused by shooting can lead to a loss of access for all.

Before shooting on DNR-managed land, please review the fire safety information and tips below. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact us at targetshooting@dnr.wa.gov

How does shooting start fires?

To prevent fires, we must know how they start. In the case of recreational target shooting, there are several common causes:

1. **Explosive or incendiary targets**
   Explosive or incendiary targets pose an extreme risk of fire danger and are **prohibited year-round on DNR-managed lands**. This includes commercial products such as Tannerite as well as any form of homemade or improvised explosive target.

2. **Tracer or incendiary ammunition**
   Tracer ammunition contains a pyrotechnic charge which allows a shooter to visually track a bullet's path. Incendiary ammunition is designed to ignite upon impact. Both represent an extreme fire hazard and are **always prohibited on DNR-managed lands**.

3. **Steel core and bi-metal jacket ammunition**
   Projectiles which contain steel in either the core or jacket pose a higher risk of causing fires than projectiles which do not contain steel. Steel core bullets contain a steel tip or core encased within a copper jacketed lead bullet. Bi-metal jacketed bullets utilize a lead core encased in a two-layer jacket comprised of steel on the inside and copper,

nickel, or gilding metal on the outside. When a steel core or bi-metal jacket bullet impacts a rock or other hard surface sparks can be created - much like flint and steel. If these sparks land in dry fuel a fire may result.

Please do not use projectiles that contain steel during hot or dry conditions. Most imported steel case ammo (Wolf, Tulammo, etc.) is loaded with bi-metal jacket projectiles. The projectiles loaded in M855/SS109 ammunition contain a steel tip. When in doubt, check your projectiles with a magnet before shooting.

4. **Superheated bullet fragments**
   Any bullet can fragment into superheated particles of metal upon impact with a hard object. These particles have the potential to ignite any dry fuels they contact. Shooters who choose to use steel targets should be particularly attentive to this risk. Steel targets should not be used during hot or dry conditions.

5. **Muzzle flame/flash**
   Muzzle flash is typically invisible during daylight hours, but nonetheless all firearms expel hot gases out of the muzzle upon firing. This is often accompanied by some amount of flame or “flash.” This, along with burning powder residue, can ignite dry fuels in the vicinity of a firing line. Never shoot near an accumulation of dry fuels and be particularly attentive when firing from the prone position.

6. **Onsite Burning**
   DNR discourages the burning of trash or debris at shooting locations. Instead, please haul away all trash at the end of your shooting session. If you do choose to have a fire for any reason, please ensure that it is completely extinguished before you leave the area and comply with all applicable burn bans.

<u>Fire Safety Tips for shooters</u>

In addition to avoiding the hazards identified above, shooters should always observe the following precautions:

1. **Don’t shoot during times of high fire danger**
   One of the best ways to avoid starting fires is to refrain from shooting during hot, dry, or windy conditions. If you shoot during the summer, do so during the cooler times of day and always avoid areas with concentrations of dry fuel.

2. **Choose safe targets and backstops**
   Make sure your bullets land in an earthen berm that is devoid of dry grass or other flammable debris. If you choose to shoot steel targets, make sure that the surrounding

area is entirely devoid of dry fuel. Never place targets on logs, stumps, or dead trees — bullets lodged inside can cause them to ignite. Don’t shoot rocks or other hard objects that are not manufactured targets. Please note that while igniting live trees is unlikely, it is **always prohibited to shoot any living tree**.

3. **Bring tools**
   When shooting at dispersed locations bring a shovel, fire extinguisher, and water. Keep these items accessible throughout your shooting session.

4. **Bring a communication device**
   Early reporting can prevent fires from becoming unmanageable. Bring a phone or other communication device and know ahead of time who to call in case of emergency. If in doubt, call 911. Report any fires promptly. Avoid shooting in areas without service if conditions are hot or dry.

5. **Stick around**
   Sparks or bullet fragments can smolder for a significant amount of time before igniting. Plan to stay at your shooting location for 30-60 minutes after shooting to observe for signs of fire. This is a great time to pick up trash!

6. **Stay aware**
   Situational awareness is critical to safety while shooting. Always be alert for any signs that a fire has started and be prepared to react quickly.