

TECHNICAL INFORMATION PAPER SERIES: WOOD CHIP & MULCH PILE STORAGE SAFETY



PREVENT WOOD CHIPS AND MULCH FROM BECOMING SERIOUS FIRE HAZARDS.

Mulch and wood chip pile fires are reported annually in every state. These piles of combustible material are susceptible to fire from various sources, including:

- Wildfires
- Lightning strikes
- Cigarettes
- Arson
- Welding and vehicle sparks
- Spontaneous combustion (see below)

DECOMPOSING MATERIALS CAN SPONTANEOUSLY COMBUST

Spontaneous combustion can happen when a decomposing material generates enough heat to ignite without an outside source. Mulch and wood chips are wood products which are continually decomposing, generating high temperatures. Because of this, a large enough pile of mulch or chips can create sufficient heat to spontaneously combust.

MULCH FIRES CAN SPREAD TO ADJOINING PROPERTIES

The location of mulch and wood chip piles can likewise pose a hazard. Fires from these piles can spread, burning and/or destroying adjoining properties and businesses. A recently reported wood chip fire spread to a nearby complex, damaging the neighboring premises and causing in excess of \$2 million in claims.

FOLLOW INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

The following information can assist you in your safety efforts regarding wood chips and mulch storage.

Preferred storage configuration for wood chips and mulch:

- Refer to *NFPA 230 Standard for the Fire Protection of Storage*¹
- Check state, local and municipal codes for recommended storage configurations

Guidelines for storage of wood chips and mulch (from NFPA 230):

- Piles should not exceed 60 feet in height, 300 feet in width or 500 feet in length
- Piles should be separated from one another by approved fire apparatus access roads
- Low barrier walls should be provided around piles to define pile perimeter and prevent creeping
- Physical protection should be provided to prevent heat sources such as steam lines, air lines, electric motors and mechanical drive equipment from becoming buried or heavily coated with material
- A minimum of 15 feet should be maintained between piles and exposing structures, yard equipment or stock depending on the degree of the exposure
- Appropriate number of fire extinguishers suitable for Class A fires shall be provided in accordance with NFPA 10, Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers
- Water supplies in the area shall be provided in accordance with NFPA 1 Uniform Fire Code
- Monitor pile temperature routinely



LEARN MORE.

For more information, contact your Risk Engineering consultant from The Hartford today or visit us online at THEHARTFORD.COM/RISKENGINEERING.

¹ *NFPA 230 Standard for the Fire Protection of Storage* can be found [here](#). You must complete the free NFPA registration to view the file.

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