

Summer fun often includes cooking outdoors with family and friends. Residents of apartments and condominiums who want to share in this favorite pastime must take special precautions. Using most grills on balconies is unsafe and against the law.

Grilling On The Balcony

Fairfax County Fire Prevention Code prohibits the use and storage of any device that uses flammables such as gasoline, charcoal lighter, liquefied petroleum gas or propane on a balcony. These restrictions are enforced for two reasons.

- There is always the danger of fire getting out of control and rapidly spreading to living areas, and the smoke given off by these devices can be harmful—even fatal.
- You cannot control the direction the wind will blow the smoke. Lethal smoke can also build up in your neighbor’s unit without you ever knowing it.

The Fairfax County Fire Prevention Code Section F-320.0, adopted by the Board of Supervisors on June 9, 1997, specifies that “No charcoal cooker, brazier, hibachi or grill or any gasoline or other flammable liquid or liquefied petroleum gas-fired stove or similar device shall be ignited or used on the balconies or within 15 feet of any apartment building or other structure with similar occupancy.”

The only cooking device permitted to be used on a balcony of an apartment or condominium is one “using either electric or natural gas as a fuel source and listed by a recognized testing authority.” Additionally, “the device

must be designed or approved for the use of lava rock or permanent briquette only.”

Electric cords should be placed where they will not be subject to physical damage. If an extension cord is used, it should be three-wire grounded and of the proper size to carry amperage or wattage of the electric grill.

The code further states that “management of such occupancies which have balconies shall notify their tenants in writing of this code requirement when the tenant initially occupies the apartment and periodically thereafter as may be necessary to ensure compliance.”

Violators of this code are subject to punishment by imprisonment not to exceed 12 months or by a fine not to exceed \$2,500 or both. Each day that a violation continues after a service of notification, is deemed a separate offense.

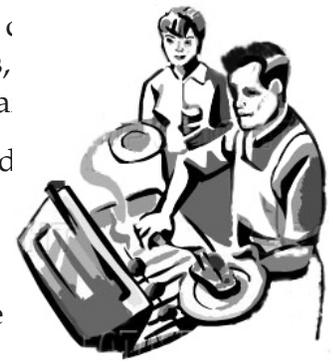
Use of any other type of grill is allowed if it is located at least 15 feet from any building or structure.

So when the urge strikes to enjoy a freshly grilled meal, remember to follow these guidelines for safe and legal outdoor cooking.

Safety Tips for Outdoor Grilling

- Gas and charcoal grills must only be used outdoors. If used indoors, or in any enclosed spaces, such as tents, they pose both a fire hazard and risks of exposing occupants to toxic gases and potential asphyxiation.
- Position the grill well away from siding, deck railings and out from under eaves and overhanging branches.

- Place grills a safe distance from lawn games, areas, and foot traffic.
- Keep children and pets away from grill areas: declare a three-foot “safe zone” around the grill.



- Put out several long-handled grilling tools to give the chef plenty of clearance from heat and flames when flipping burgers.
- Periodically remove grease or fat build-up in trays below the grill so it cannot be ignited by a hot grill.

Charcoal Grills

- Purchase the proper starter fluid and store the can out of reach of children, and away from heat sources.
- Never add charcoal starter fluid when coals or kindling have already been ignited, and never use any flammable or combustible liquid other than charcoal starter fluid to get the fire going.

Gas Grills

- Check the gas cylinder hose for leaks before using it for the first time each year. A light soap and water solution applied to the hose will quickly reveal escaping propane by releasing bubbles. If you determine your grill has a gas leak, by smell or the soapy bubble test, and there is no flame:
 - Turn off the gas tank and grill.

- If the leak stops, get the grill serviced by a professional before using it again.
 - If the leak does not stop, call 911.
- If you smell gas while cooking, immediately get away from the grill and call 911. Do not attempt to move the grill.
 - All gas cylinders manufactured after April 2002 must have overfill protection devices (OPD). These devices shut off the flow of gas before capacity is reached, limiting the potential for release of propane gas if the cylinder heats up. They are easily identified by their triangular-shaped hand wheel.
 - Use only equipment bearing the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturers' instructions on how to set up the grill and maintain it.
 - Never store propane gas cylinders in buildings or garages. If you store a gas grill inside during the winter, disconnect the cylinder and leave it outside.

Did you know?

According to the National Fire Protection Association:

- Each year gas-fueled and charcoal grills cause an average of 900 home structure fires and 3,500 home outdoor fires.
- Gas grills have a higher fire risk than charcoal grills. Leaks and breaks in the gas cylinder or hose are the leading cause, accounting for nearly half of gas grill fires.
- Placing combustibles too close to heat, and leaving cooking unattended, are the two leading causes for charcoal grill home fires.
- Half of all gas grill and charcoal grill home structure fires begin on an exterior balcony or open porch.

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