How to Host a Solstice Bonfire Gathering

A step-by-step guide for Firewise leaders and community organizers.

Purpose: To help communities host a safe, meaningful, and compliant Winter Solstice event that celebrates renewal, builds relationships & demonstrates model burning practices.

Event Overview

- Date: December 21 (or nearest weekend).
- Duration: 2–3 hours (late afternoon through early evening).
- Location: Safe burn site or open meadow with good visibility & access.

Planning Checklist

2–3 Weeks Before

- Confirm local burn day rules (check CAL FIRE / Air Quality Management District).
- Identify & prep safe site (clear 10 ft radius, away from trees & structures).
- Invite local fire personnel or Firewise rep for short demo / talk.
- Send invites via email + social + flyers.
- Prepare 'How to Burn Safely' handout & signage for event.
- Assign roles: Event Lead, Burn Supervisor, Host/MC, Photographer, Parking.

1 Week Before

- Check weather forecast - cancel if wind >10 mph or Red Flag Warning in effect.
- Secure burn permit & notify dispatch (if required).
- Arrange refreshments & supplies (hot cocoa, cider, snacks, smores, cookie exchange).
- Print handouts & set up signage.

Event Day

- Begin set up 2 hours before event start.
- Rake or blow any leaves or needles that have landed in 10 ft mineral soil area.
- Conduct fire safety demonstration before lighting main bonfire.
- Light fire under supervision, with hose, shovel & extinguisher on site.
- Facilitate brief storytelling or reflection circle.
- End with safe extinguish demonstration - soak, stir & check for cold.
- Capture photos/video for outreach.

After Event

- Ensure fire is completely out - cold to the touch (use the back of your hand).
- Share photos & post on social media.

Pro Tips

- Keep pile under 4'x4'x4'unless it's permissible to have a larger pile.
- Always have water + tool + adult present.
- Avoid wet/green wood - dry only.
- Burn late afternoon to early evening for visibility
- Remember to stay until fire is cold.
- Frame as both community celebration + learning moment!