

**Chapter 52.12 RCW**  
**POWERS—BURNING PERMITS**

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*Association of fire commissioners to furnish information to legislature and governor: RCW 44.04.170.*

**RCW 52.12.011 Status.** Fire protection districts created under this title are political subdivisions of the state and shall be held to be municipal corporations within the laws and Constitution of the state of Washington. A fire protection district shall constitute a body corporate and possess all the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes as well as all other powers that may now or hereafter be specifically conferred by law. [1984 c 230 s 18; 1967 c 164 s 5; 1939 c 34 s 15; RRS s 5654-115. Formerly RCW 52.08.010.]

**Purpose—Severability—1967 c 164:** See notes following RCW 4.96.010.

**RCW 52.12.021 General powers.** Fire protection districts have full authority to carry out their purposes and to that end may acquire, purchase, hold, lease, manage, occupy, and sell real and personal property, or any interest therein, to enter into and to perform any and all necessary contracts, to appoint and employ the necessary officers, agents, and employees, to sue and be sued, to exercise the right of eminent domain, to levy and enforce the collection of assessments and special taxes in the manner and subject to the limitations provided in this title against the lands within the district for district revenues, and to do any and all lawful acts required and expedient to carry out the purpose of this title. [1984 c 230 s 19; 1939 c 34 s 16; RRS s 5654-116. Formerly RCW 52.08.020.]

**RCW 52.12.031 Specific powers—Acquisition or lease of property or equipment—Contracts—Association of districts—Group life insurance—Building inspections—Fire investigations.** Any fire protection district organized under this title may:

(1) Lease, acquire, own, maintain, operate, and provide fire and emergency medical apparatus and all other necessary or proper facilities, machinery, and equipment for the prevention and suppression of fires, the providing of emergency medical services and the protection of life and property;

(2) Enter into an interlocal agreement with any local jurisdiction to maintain and repair any vehicle or equipment owned and used exclusively by such county, city, town, school district, or other political subdivision of the state of Washington. As used in this subsection, "local jurisdiction" means any county, city, town, school district, or other political subdivision of the state of Washington;

(3) Lease, acquire, own, maintain, and operate real property, improvements, and fixtures for housing, repairing, and maintaining the apparatus, facilities, machinery, and equipment described in subsection (1) of this section;

(4) Contract with any governmental entity under chapter 39.34 RCW or private person or entity to consolidate, provide, or cooperate for fire prevention protection, fire suppression, investigation, and emergency medical purposes. In so contracting, the district or governmental entity is deemed for all purposes to be acting within its governmental capacity. This contracting authority includes the furnishing of fire prevention, fire suppression, investigation, emergency medical services, facilities, and equipment to or by the district, governmental entity, or private person or entity;

(5) Encourage uniformity and coordination of fire protection district operations. The fire commissioners of fire protection districts may form an association to secure information of value in suppressing and preventing fires and other district purposes, to hold and attend meetings, and to promote more economical and efficient operation of the associated fire protection districts. The commissioners of fire protection districts in the association shall adopt articles of association or articles of incorporation for a nonprofit corporation, select a chair, secretary, and other officers

as they may determine, and may employ and discharge agents and employees as the officers deem convenient to carry out the purposes of the association. The expenses of the association may be paid from funds paid into the association by fire protection districts: PROVIDED, That the aggregate contributions made to the association by a district in a calendar year shall not exceed two and one-half cents per thousand dollars of assessed valuation;

(6) Enter into contracts to provide group life insurance for the benefit of the personnel of the fire districts;

(7) Perform building and property inspections that the district deems necessary to provide fire prevention services and pre-fire planning within the district and any area that the district serves by contract in accordance with RCW 19.27.110: PROVIDED, That codes used by the district for building and property inspections shall be limited to the applicable codes adopted by the state, county, city, or town that has jurisdiction over the area in which the property is located. A copy of inspection reports prepared by the district shall be furnished by the district to the appropriate state, county, city, or town that has jurisdiction over the area in which the property is located: PROVIDED, That nothing in this subsection shall be construed to grant code enforcement authority to a district. This subsection shall not be construed as imposing liability on any governmental jurisdiction;

(8) Determine the origin and cause of fires occurring within the district and any area the district serves by contract. In exercising the authority conferred by this subsection, the fire protection district and its authorized representatives shall comply with the provisions of RCW 43.44.050;

(9) Perform acts consistent with this title and not otherwise prohibited by law. [2019 c 402 s 1; 2010 c 8 s 15002; 1995 c 369 s 65; 1986 c 311 s 1; 1984 c 238 s 1; 1973 1st ex.s. c 195 s 48; 1963 c 101 s 1; 1959 c 237 s 2; 1947 c 254 s 6; 1941 c 70 s 4; 1939 c 34 s 20; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-120. Formerly RCW 52.08.030.]

**Effective date—1995 c 369:** See note following RCW 43.43.930.

**Severability—Effective dates and termination dates—Construction—1973 1st ex.s. c 195:** See notes following RCW 84.52.043.

*Hospitalization and medical insurance authorized: RCW 41.04.180.*

*Use of city fire apparatus beyond city limits: RCW 35.84.040.*

**RCW 52.12.036 Community revitalization financing—Public improvements.** In addition to other authority that a fire protection district possesses, a fire protection district may provide any public improvement as defined under RCW 39.89.020, but this additional authority is limited to participating in the financing of the public improvements as provided under RCW 39.89.050.

This section does not limit the authority of a fire protection district to otherwise participate in the public improvements if that authority exists elsewhere. [2001 c 212 s 17.]

**RCW 52.12.041 Eminent domain.** The taking and damaging of property or property rights by a fire protection district to carry out the purposes of its organization are declared to be for a public use. A district organized under this title may exercise the power of eminent domain to acquire property or property rights either inside or outside the district, for the use of the district. A district exercising the power of eminent domain shall proceed in the name of the district in the manner provided by law for the appropriation of real property or of real property rights by private corporations. [1984 c 230 s 20; 1939 c 34 s 18; RRS s 5654-118. Formerly RCW 52.08.040.]

*Eminent domain: State Constitution Art. 1 s 16 (Amendment 9); chapter 8.20 RCW.*

**RCW 52.12.051 Condemnation proceedings.** A fire protection district may unite in a single action, proceedings to condemn property which is held by separate owners. Two or more condemnation suits instituted separately may also, in the discretion of the court, upon a motion of an interested party, be consolidated into a single action. In these cases, the jury shall render separate verdicts for each tract of land in different ownership. A finding of the jury or decree of the court as to damages shall not in any manner be construed to abridge or destroy the right of the district to levy and collect taxes for district purposes against the uncondemned land situated within the district. The title acquired by a fire protection district in condemnation proceedings shall be the fee simple title or a lesser estate as designated in the decree of appropriation. [1984 c 230 s 21; 1939 c 34 s 19; RRS s 5654-119. Formerly RCW 52.08.050.]

**RCW 52.12.061 Contracts, promissory notes, deeds of trust, and mortgages for purchase of property—Limit on indebtedness—Election, when.** Fire protection districts may execute executory conditional sales contracts, installment promissory notes secured by a deed of trust, or mortgages with a governmental entity or a private party for the purchase or sale of any real or personal property, or property rights: PROVIDED, That the purchase price specified in a contract or promissory note to purchase property does not result in a total indebtedness in excess of three-eighths of one percent of the value of the taxable property in the fire protection district: PROVIDED FURTHER, That if a proposed purchase contract or promissory note would result in a total indebtedness in excess of that amount, a proposition to determine whether that contract or promissory note may be executed shall be submitted to the voters for approval or rejection in the same manner that bond issues for capital purposes are submitted to the voters: AND PROVIDED FURTHER, That a fire protection district may jointly execute contracts, promissory notes, deeds of trust, or mortgages authorized by this section with any governmental entity.

The term "value of the taxable property" shall have the meaning set forth in RCW 39.36.015. [1984 c 230 s 27; 1970 ex.s. c 42 s 29; 1965 c 21 s 1. Formerly RCW 52.08.080.]

**Severability—Effective date—1970 ex.s. c 42:** See notes following RCW 39.36.015.

**RCW 52.12.071 Liability insurance for officials and employees.**

The board of commissioners of each fire district may purchase liability insurance with limits it deems reasonable for the purpose of protecting its officials and employees against liability for personal or bodily injuries and property damage arising from their acts or omissions while performing or in good faith purporting to perform their official duties. [1984 c 230 s 28; 1973 c 125 s 3. Formerly RCW 52.08.090.]

**RCW 52.12.101 Burning permits authorized—Resolution.**

In any district in which the commissioners have adopted and published a resolution assuming the authority of issuing burning permits, a person, firm, or corporation shall not start, permit, or cause to be started or permitted an open fire on any land within a fire protection district, without a written permit issued by the district under terms and conditions as the district establishes by resolution. A fire district shall not assume authority to issue a burning permit for a fire on any forest or cut over land, except as otherwise provided by law. A fire district shall have the authority to revoke a permit issued by the district for the protection of life or property or to prevent or abate the nuisances caused by such burning. [1987 c 21 s 1; 1984 c 229 s 1; 1947 c 254 s 20; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-151i. Formerly RCW 52.28.010.]

**RCW 52.12.102 Burning permits—Resolution to be published and posted.**

The commissioners of a district may adopt a resolution authorizing the district to issue fire permits and establishing the terms and conditions under which the permit shall be issued. Notice of the resolution shall be published once a week for three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published in the county and of general circulation in the district and post it in three public places in the district. The affidavit of publication by the publisher and of the clerk of the district of the posting shall be filed in the records of the district. Ten days after the posting and the last publication, the resolution shall take effect. [1984 c 229 s 2; 1947 c 254 s 21; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-151j. Formerly RCW 52.28.020.]

**RCW 52.12.103 Burning permits—Issuance—Contents.**

Burning permits may be issued upon request, by the persons authorized by the commissioners when the issuing officer deems it appropriate. The permit shall designate the premises and the exact location where the fire may be started and permitted, the nature of the material to be burned, the time limit of the permit, and may contain any special requirements and conditions pertaining to the fire and the control of the fire as the issuing officer deems appropriate. [1984 c 229 s 3; 1947 c 254 s 22; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-151k. Formerly RCW 52.28.030.]

**RCW 52.12.104 Burning permits—Duties of permittee.**

The permittee shall comply with the terms and conditions of the permit, and shall maintain a responsible person in charge of the fire at all times who shall maintain the fire under control, not permit it to spread to other property or structures, and extinguish the fire when

the authorized burning is completed or when directed by district personnel. The possession of a permit shall not relieve the permittee from liability for damages resulting from the fire for which the permittee may otherwise be liable. [1984 c 229 s 4; 1947 c 254 s 23; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-1511. Formerly RCW 52.28.040.]

*Crimes relating to fires: Chapter 9A.48 RCW.*

*Liability for fire damage: RCW 4.24.040, 4.24.050, 4.24.060, 76.04.495, 76.04.750.*

**RCW 52.12.105 Burning permits—Penalty.** The violation of or failure to comply with any provision of this chapter pertaining to fire permits, or of any term or condition of the permit, is a misdemeanor. [1947 c 254 s 24; Rem. Supp. 1947 s 5654-151m. Formerly RCW 52.28.050.]

**RCW 52.12.106 Burning permits—Penalty.** The violation of or failure to comply with any provision of this chapter pertaining to fire permits, or of any term or condition of the permit, is a misdemeanor. [1984 c 229 s 5.]

**RCW 52.12.108 Burning permits—Liability for fire suppression costs.** If a person starts a fire without a permit or if a permit holder fails to comply with any provision of this chapter pertaining to fire permits, or of any term or condition of the permit, and as a result of that failure the district is required to suppress a fire, the person or permit holder is liable to the district to reimburse it for the costs of the fire suppression services. [1984 c 229 s 6.]

**RCW 52.12.111 Use of equipment and personnel beyond district boundaries—Governmental function.** A fire protection district may permit, under conditions prescribed by the fire commissioners of the district, the use of its equipment and personnel beyond the boundaries of the district. Any use made of the equipment or personnel under this section shall be deemed an exercise of a governmental function of the district. [1984 c 230 s 77; 1980 c 43 s 1; 1969 c 88 s 2. Formerly RCW 52.36.025.]

**RCW 52.12.121 Use of equipment and personnel outside district—Duty of firefighter deemed duty for district—Benefits not impaired.** If a firefighter engages in any duty outside the boundaries of the district the duty shall be considered as part of the duty as firefighter for the district, and a firefighter who is injured while engaged in duties outside the boundaries of the district shall be entitled to the same benefits that the firefighter or the firefighter's dependents would be entitled to receive if the injury occurred within the district. [1984 c 230 s 78; 1969 c 88 s 3. Formerly RCW 52.36.027.]

**RCW 52.12.125 Reimbursement for fire suppression costs on state lands—Limitations.** Fire protection districts in proximity to land protected by a state agency are encouraged to enter into mutually beneficial contracts covering reciprocal response arrangements. In the absence of such a contractual agreement, a fire protection district that takes immediate action on such land outside of its jurisdictional boundaries, if such immediate response could prevent the spread of the fire onto lands protected by the district, shall be reimbursed by the state agency for its reasonable fire suppression costs that are incurred until the responsible agency takes charge, but in no event shall the costs exceed a twenty-four hour period. A fire protection district suppressing a fire on such lands shall as soon as practicable notify the responsible agency. The state agency shall not be responsible to pay such reimbursement if it is not so notified.

Reasonable efforts shall be taken to protect evidence of the fire's origin. The state agency shall not be responsible to pay such reimbursement if reasonable efforts are not taken to protect such evidence.

Requests for reimbursement shall be submitted within thirty days of the complete suppression of the fire. Reasonable costs submitted for reimbursement include all salaries and expenses of personnel, equipment, and supplies and shall take into consideration the amount of compensation, if any, paid by the fire protection district to its firefighters. [1986 c 311 s 2.]

**RCW 52.12.131 Emergency medical services—Establishment and collection of charges.** Any fire protection district which provides emergency medical services, may by resolution establish and collect reasonable charges for these services in order to reimburse the district for its costs of providing emergency medical services. [1984 c 230 s 81; 1975 c 64 s 1. Formerly RCW 52.36.090.]

**RCW 52.12.135 Interlocal agreements for ambulance services.** (1)  
A rural fire protection district organized under this title may enter into a contract pursuant to chapter 39.34 RCW with a contiguous city for the furnishing by the city to the fire protection district or districts of emergency medical services in the form of ambulance services, provided that the contract may not provide for the establishment of any ambulance service that would compete with any existing, private ambulance service. The fire protection district or districts may impose a monthly utility service charge on each developed residential property located in the portion of the fire protection district or districts served pursuant to the contract in an amount equal to the amount imposed by the city on similar city developed residential property. Developed residential property includes single-family residences, apartments, manufactured homes, mobile homes, and trailers available for occupancy for a continuous period greater than thirty days. A fire protection district or districts may contract with the contiguous city or with any other governmental entity pursuant to chapter 39.34 RCW for the billing and collection services related to the monthly utility service charge for ambulance service. A city providing ambulance services to a fire protection district or districts under a contract entered into pursuant to this subsection may charge individuals actually using the

ambulance services reasonable rates and charges for the ambulance services.

(2) For purposes of this section, "rural" means a population density within the fire protection district or districts as a whole of ten or fewer persons per square mile. [2003 c 209 s 1.]

**RCW 52.12.140 Hazardous materials response teams.** Fire protection districts may cooperate and participate with counties, cities, or towns in providing hazardous materials response teams under the county, city, or town emergency management plan provided for in RCW 38.52.070. The participation and cooperation shall be pursuant to an agreement or contract entered into under chapter 39.34 RCW. [1986 c 278 s 49.]

**Severability—1986 c 278:** See note following RCW 36.01.010.

**RCW 52.12.150 Setting fires for firefighter instruction—When burning permit not required—Notice, inspection required.** Without obtaining a permit issued under RCW 70A.15.5090, fire protection district firefighters may set fire to structures located outside of urban growth areas in counties that plan under the requirements of RCW 36.70A.040, and outside of any city with a population of ten thousand or more in all other counties, for instruction in methods of firefighting, if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) In consideration of prevailing air patterns, the fire is unlikely to cause air pollution in areas of sensitivity downwind of the proposed fire location;

(2) The fire is not located in an area that is declared to be in an air pollution episode or any stage of an impaired air quality as defined in RCW 70A.15.6010 and 70A.15.3580;

(3) Nuisance laws are applicable to the fire, including nuisances related to the unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of life and property and the depositing of particulate matter or ash on other property;

(4) Notice of the fire is provided to the owners of property adjoining the property on which the fire will occur, to other persons who potentially will be impacted by the fire, and to additional persons in a broader manner as specifically requested by the local air pollution control agency or the department of ecology;

(5) Each structure that is proposed to be set on fire must be identified specifically as a structure to be set on fire. Each other structure on the same parcel of property that is not proposed to be set on fire must be identified specifically as a structure not to be set on fire; and

(6) Before setting a structure on fire, a good-faith inspection is conducted by the fire agency or fire protection district conducting the training fire to determine if materials containing asbestos are present, the inspection is documented in writing and forwarded to the appropriate local air authority or the department of ecology if there is no local air authority, and asbestos that is found is removed as required by state and federal laws. [2021 c 65 s 58; 2000 c 199 s 1; 1994 c 28 s 1.]



**Explanatory statement—2021 c 65:** See note following RCW 53.54.030.

**RCW 52.12.160 Firefighting services for unprotected lands.** (1)

The definitions in this section apply throughout this section and RCW 4.24.780 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(a) "Fire protection service agency" or "agency" means any local, state, or federal governmental entity responsible for the provision of firefighting services, including fire protection districts, regional fire protection service authorities, cities, towns, port districts, the department of natural resources, and federal reservations.

(b) "Fire protection jurisdiction" means an area or property located within a fire protection district, a regional fire protection service authority, a city, a town, a port district, lands protected by the department of natural resources under chapter 76.04 RCW, or on federal lands.

(c) "Firefighting services" means the provision of fire prevention services, fire suppression services, emergency medical services, and other services related to the protection of life and property.

(d) "Improved property" means property upon which a structure is located, including bridges and agricultural structures as defined in RCW 19.27.015.

(e) "Property" means land, structures, or land and structures.

(f) "Unimproved property" has the same meaning as "unimproved lands" in RCW 76.04.005.

(g) "Unprotected land" means improved property located outside a fire protection jurisdiction.

(2) (a) In order to facilitate the provision of firefighting services to unprotected lands, property owners of unprotected lands are encouraged, to the extent practicable, to form or annex into a fire protection jurisdiction or to enter into a written contractual agreement with a fire protection service agency or agencies for the provision of firefighting services. Any written contractual agreement between a property owner and a fire protection service agency must include, at minimum, a risk assessment of the property as well as a capabilities assessment for the district.

(b) Property owners of unprotected land who choose not to form or annex into a fire protection jurisdiction or to enter into a written contractual agreement with a fire protection agency or agencies for the provision of firefighting services, do so willingly and with full knowledge that a fire protection service agency is not obligated to provide firefighting services to unprotected land.

(3) In the absence of a written contractual agreement, a fire protection service agency may initiate firefighting services on unprotected land outside its fire protection jurisdiction in the following instances: (a) Service was specifically requested by a landowner or other fire service protection agency; (b) service could reasonably be believed to prevent the spread of a fire onto lands protected by the agency; or (c) service could reasonably be believed to substantially mitigate the risk of harm to life or property by preventing the spread of a fire onto other unprotected lands.

(4) (a) The property owner or owners shall reimburse an agency initiating firefighting services on unprotected land outside its fire protection jurisdiction for actual costs that are incurred that are

proportionate to the fire itself. Cost recovery is based upon the Washington fire chiefs standardized fire service fee schedule.

(b) If a property owner fails to pay or defaults in payment to an agency for services rendered, the agency is entitled to pursue payment through the collections process outlined in RCW 19.16.500 or through initiation of court action. [2012 c 14 s 1; 2011 c 200 s 1.]