

The Muirburn Code 2017 – Supplementary Information 1

To Burn, to Cut or to do Neither

Burning or cutting is not essential for the maintenance of all moorland vegetation, and most of Scotland's moorland is not burnt or cut. It is important to consider the aims of land management, and whether burning or cutting is required in order to achieve those aims. It is also important to identify where the negative impacts of burning or cutting will be so severe that they should not be carried out. If it is decided that burning or cutting is beneficial, the following factors should be considered.

Factor	Burning	Cutting
Heather regeneration	<p>After burning older heather, the main form of regeneration is likely to be from seed, and burning creates a better environment for seed germination and seedling survival.</p> <p>There is less difference in the rate of regeneration after cutting or burning younger heather.</p>	<p>Cutting thick heather can produce a mat of cut material on top of the cut stems, which may restrict the ability of younger plants to re-sprout, and create poor conditions for germination of the seed in the soil seedbank.</p>
People	<p>Well-trained and equipped burning teams are required, with at least three people in each team.</p>	<p>Cutting can be carried out by one person, providing health and safety criteria are met.</p>
Terrain	<p>Burning can be carried out on ground where the use of machinery would be impractical, but burning is not suitable for very steep slopes and rocky areas.</p>	<p>Cutting is limited to ground accessible to vehicles. Modern lightweight machinery is better able to access difficult ground.</p>
Equipment required	<p>A range of equipment: means of ignition, heather beaters, back packs for water application.</p> <p>Fire fogging equipment, commercial leaf blowers and/or a tractor & cutting equipment will increase the ability to control fire and increase the rate of work.</p>	<p>A tractor or other vehicle capable of mounting / towing equipment, cutting equipment (such as: flail or T bar cutter).</p> <p>Vehicles with high ground pressure can cause compaction.</p> <p>Expensive equipment is required to work in rough terrain; the risk of damage can be high.</p>
Speed	<p>Burning is normally a faster process than cutting, allowing more heather to be managed in a short time period.</p>	<p>Cutting is often a slower process.</p>
Weather	<p>Burning can only take place on days when the weather and the condition of the vegetation allow burning to take place safely.</p>	<p>Cutting is much less dependent on favourable weather.</p>

Firebreaks	With an experienced burning team, effective firebreaks can be produced using back burning.	Cutting can be used to create firebreaks in support of burning, where cutting is possible.
Safety and wildfire	There is always a risk of damage being caused by a fire getting out of control. The risk is higher for inexperienced people and where there has been insufficient planning and preparation.	There is a very low fire risk associated with cutting, and therefore a very low risk of fire spreading into unintended places. As a result, cutting can be the favoured option close to houses, woodland, watercourses and public access areas.