



Indigenous Smudging Policy

Last Update: August 2026
Approved by Vote: Executive Board

Purpose

FMMHA recognizes smudging as a sacred Indigenous cultural and spiritual practice. This policy establishes a respectful, consistent and safe process for requesting and accommodating smudging ceremonies during FMMHA-sanctioned activities while meeting facility, fire-safety and operational requirements.

Guiding Principles

- Respect for Indigenous rights, cultures, traditions and spiritual practices.
- Cultural safety, dignity and voluntary participation.
- Safety of players, officials, families, spectators, volunteers and facility staff.
- Collaboration and clear communication among FMMHA, ceremony leaders and facility operators.
- Compliance with applicable fire codes, approved fire-safety plans and facility requirements.
- Education, inclusion and reconciliation within minor hockey.

Scope

This policy applies to FMMHA teams, programs, members, volunteers and sanctioned activities when a smudging ceremony is requested at an arena or associated facility used by FMMHA. It does not override the authority of a facility operator, the RMWB Fire Prevention Branch, emergency services, applicable legislation or an approved facility fire-safety plan.

Definitions

Smudging: A sacred Indigenous ceremony that may involve burning or smouldering medicines such as sage, sweetgrass, cedar or tobacco for spiritual cleansing, grounding, prayer or other culturally appropriate purposes.

Ceremony Lead: The Knowledge Keeper, Elder or other Indigenous person identified to lead or support the ceremony in accordance with the applicable cultural protocol.

Director of Indigenous Development: The FMMHA representative responsible for Indigenous engagement, cultural coordination and administration of requests under this policy.

Facility Representative: The person designated by the facility operator to review requests and coordinate operational and safety requirements.

Fire Watch: A responsible adult formally assigned to continuously monitor the area or building identified by the facility whenever automatic fire detection is unavailable, and to perform the duties established by the facility's fire-safety plan.

Requestor: The FMMHA team, program, member or designate seeking approval for a smudging ceremony.



Policy Statements

- FMMHA will make reasonable efforts to accommodate Indigenous smudging ceremonies in partnership with the applicable facility operator.
- Smudging may occur only after the applicable facility has provided confirmation and all required safety arrangements are in place.
- Approval of this policy does not constitute automatic approval of an individual ceremony or location.
- Participation in a smudging ceremony is voluntary. No player, family member, official, volunteer or staff member will be required to participate.
- Individuals who do not participate will be treated respectfully and, where practical, provided an opportunity to step away without penalty or drawing unnecessary attention.
- Only authorized facility personnel may disarm, isolate, reactivate or otherwise operate a fire-alarm or automatic detection system.
- Facility-specific requirements take precedence where they are more stringent than this policy.

Roles and Responsibilities

Requestor or Team

- Submit the request to the Director of Indigenous Development within the applicable notice period.
- Provide the proposed date, start and end time, location, participating team or group and any known cultural considerations.
- Identify a responsible adult who can serve as fire watch if required by the facility.
- Ensure players, coaches and families receive appropriate information, including that participation is voluntary.
- Follow all directions issued by the Director of Indigenous Development, Ceremony Lead and facility staff.

Director of Indigenous Development

- Receive, review and coordinate smudging requests.
- Consult with the requestor and, where appropriate, a Ceremony Lead to identify applicable cultural protocols.
- Submit or coordinate the request with the applicable facility representative and ensure required parties are copied.
- Confirm the ceremony details, facility approval and safety requirements in writing before the ceremony.
- Ensure a designated FMMHA representative is present and that a fire watch is assigned when required.
- Notify facility staff immediately when the ceremony is complete and retain required records.

Ceremony Lead

- Lead or support the ceremony in accordance with appropriate Indigenous cultural protocols.
- Work within the location, timeframe and safety conditions approved by the facility.



- Provide guidance on respectful handling of medicines, ashes and ceremonial items while meeting fire-safety requirements.

Facility Management and Staff

- Review the request and confirm whether the proposed ceremony can be accommodated.
- Identify the approved location, timeframe, ventilation arrangements and any other facility conditions.
- Determine whether fire-alarm or automatic detection systems require isolation and implement this work using authorized personnel only.
- Define the area, duration and duties of any required fire watch in accordance with the facility's fire-safety plan.
- Restore affected systems immediately after notification that the ceremony is complete and document isolation and reactivation as required.

Request and Approval Procedure

Step 1: Submit the Request

The requestor contacts the Director of Indigenous Development and provides the proposed date, start and end time, exact location, team or group involved, ceremony lead if known, requestor contact information and any known cultural considerations. At RRC-operated facilities, the request must be submitted at least 72 hours in advance.

Step 2: Confirm Cultural Protocol

The Director of Indigenous Development consults with the requestor and, where appropriate, the Ceremony Lead to confirm the ceremonial needs, medicines to be used, participant information and respectful handling of materials.

Step 3: Obtain Facility Approval

The Director of Indigenous Development submits or coordinates the request with the applicable facility. The request is not approved until the facility confirms the location, timeframe, ventilation, fire-system arrangements, fire-watch requirements and any additional conditions.

Step 4: Confirm Responsibilities

Before the ceremony, the Director of Indigenous Development confirms the Ceremony Lead, FMMHA on-site representative, fire-watch designate if required, facility contact and method for notifying staff when the ceremony is complete.

Step 5: Conduct the Ceremony

The ceremony takes place only in the approved location and timeframe. The Ceremony Lead directs the cultural practice. The FMMHA representative and fire watch follow facility instructions, and the ceremony must stop immediately if directed by facility staff or if an unsafe condition develops.

Step 6: Complete and Restore

When the ceremony ends, materials are extinguished and handled in accordance with Section 8. The FMMHA representative notifies facility staff. The fire watch remains on duty until authorized facility staff confirm that all affected systems are fully operational.

Step 7: Document Completion

The Director of Indigenous Development records the date, facility, approved location, ceremony timeframe, on-site representative, fire-watch designate where applicable, facility confirmation and any follow-up required.



General Fire and Life-Safety Requirements

All ceremonies must comply with the facility's approved fire-safety plan, applicable fire-code requirements and directions issued by facility staff or the RMWB Fire Prevention Branch.

- Sacred medicines must be burned or smouldered in a sturdy, non-combustible container capable of safely catching falling embers.
- The container must be handled and placed so heat cannot burn a person or transfer to a combustible surface.
- Smouldering materials must be kept a safe distance from curtains, furniture, clothing, hockey equipment, paper products and other combustible materials.
- Burning or smouldering materials must never be left unattended.
- Children and other participants must be appropriately supervised and kept a safe distance from hot containers and smouldering medicines.
- The ceremony may occur only in the facility-approved area, with ventilation arranged as directed by facility staff.
- Windows, fans or other air movement must not be allowed to carry embers or create another hazard.
- Emergency exits, corridors and access routes must remain unobstructed.
- No additional ignition sources are permitted unless specifically authorized.
- The ceremony must stop immediately if an unsafe condition, alarm or emergency occurs.

Fire Alarm and Fire Watch

- Any isolation of a fire-alarm or automatic detection system must be permitted under the facility's approved fire-safety plan.
- Only authorized facility personnel may operate or alter fire-safety systems.
- A fire watch must be maintained for the area or building identified by the facility for the entire period automatic detection is unavailable.
- The fire watch must remain present, attentive and free from any other duty that could interfere with continuous monitoring.
- The fire watch must know how to contact facility staff and emergency services and must immediately report fire, smoke or any unsafe condition.
- Smudging must not begin until facility staff confirm that required precautions are in place.
- The fire watch must remain on duty until facility staff confirm that all affected systems have been restored.

Extinguishment and Disposal

- All medicines, embers and ashes must be fully extinguished at the conclusion of the ceremony.
- Smouldering materials must not be placed in an ordinary garbage container.
- Ashes and remaining materials must be placed in a facility-approved, UL-rated ash container until cool to the touch, or thoroughly extinguished using a method approved by the facility.
- Disposal must meet facility fire-safety requirements and, wherever possible, respect guidance from the Ceremony Lead regarding culturally appropriate handling.
- The ceremony area must be inspected before participants leave.



Facility-Specific Requirements

The following requirements supplement the general policy. If a facility establishes additional or more stringent requirements, those requirements must be followed.

RRC - Anzac Recreation Centre and MacDonald Island Park

- Requests must be submitted to Sports Reservations at least 72 hours in advance and must include the ceremony's start and end time and exact location or locations.
- The Director of Indigenous Development will copy the designated RRC facility representative on the request.
- The request is not approved until Sports Reservations or the appropriate RRC representative provides confirmation.
- FMMHA must assign a responsible adult as fire watch for the entire duration required by RRC whenever automatic fire detection is disarmed.
- RRC will provide the detailed fire-watch duties after confirming the request.
- Only authorized RRC personnel may disarm or restore fire-safety systems.
- The fire watch remains on duty until RRC confirms that the affected systems are fully operational.

Frank Lacroix Arena

- Requests must be reviewed by the designated Frank Lacroix Arena representative and conducted in accordance with the arena's approved fire-safety plan and the RMWB Fire Prevention Branch's smudging guidance.
- The parties must confirm the approved location, timeframe, ventilation, fire-system arrangements, required fire-watch coverage and ash-disposal process before the ceremony.
- If fire detection is taken offline, the fire watch must cover the area or remainder of the building identified in the facility fire-safety plan.
- Only authorized facility personnel may isolate or restore a fire-safety system.

Fort McKay Arena

Fort McKay Arena has identified no additional facility-specific requirements. Requests remain subject to the general approval, cultural, fire and life-safety requirements established in this policy and any direction provided by authorized facility staff at the time of the request.

Centerfire Place

Requests are subject to the advance-notice, approval, ventilation, fire-system, fire-watch and disposal requirements confirmed by the Centerfire Place representative.

Education, Privacy and Respect

- Where appropriate, FMMHA may provide age-appropriate information about smudging and its cultural significance before a ceremony.
- Information must be shared respectfully and must not present one Nation's protocol as universal to all Indigenous peoples.
- Photography, video recording or social-media sharing during a ceremony requires the permission of the Ceremony Lead and any individuals who may be identifiable.



- Questions or concerns must be addressed respectfully through the Director of Indigenous Development and must not interrupt or undermine the ceremony.

Emergencies, Cancellation and Non-Compliance

- Facility staff may delay, relocate, stop or cancel a ceremony when operational or safety requirements cannot be met.
- In an emergency, the facility's emergency procedures and directions from facility staff or emergency services take immediate priority.
- A ceremony must not proceed without facility confirmation or when the required fire watch, approved location or safety controls are unavailable.
- Failure to follow this policy or facility directions may result in the ceremony being stopped and may affect approval of future requests until concerns are addressed.

Records, Accountability and Review

- The Director of Indigenous Development is accountable for consistent administration of this policy and maintaining request and confirmation records.
- Facility operators remain responsible for their own fire-safety systems, plans, records and operational decisions.
- The policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner following legislative, facility or procedural changes or a safety incident.
- Reviews should include input from Indigenous partners, Ceremony Leads, participating teams and facility representatives.
- Changes to facility contacts or administrative submission details may be updated in Appendix A without requiring a substantive policy amendment, provided the safety requirements are unchanged.



P.O. BOX 5118, FORT McMURRAY, ALBERTA T9H 3G2 | PH. 780-791-7358

EMAIL: Vpadmin@fmmha.com | WEBSITE: www.fmmha.com



References

National Fire Code - 2023 Alberta Edition, Division B, Section 2.8 (Emergency Planning).

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Fire Prevention Branch, Smudging Information, March 31, 2025.

Applicable facility fire-safety plans, booking requirements and operational procedures.

Appendix A - Facility Contacts and Requirements

Contact details and administrative procedures may be updated as facility representatives change. Any change to safety requirements must be reviewed before implementation.

Facility	Representative	Confirmed Requirements
Fort McKay Arena	Shay Laurent	No additional requirements; general policy applies
Anzac Recreation Centre	Eric Leatham, RRC	Minimum 72 hours; RRC fire watch when detection is disarmed
MacDonald Island Park	Eric Leatham, RRC	Minimum 72 hours; RRC fire watch when detection is disarmed
Centerfire Place	Terry Conners	No additional requirements; general policy applies
Frank Lacroix Arena	Craig Organ	Facility fire-safety plan and RMWB Fire Prevention guidance



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