

# Burn Barrels



They're

Unhealthy, Unneighborly, Unnecessary and Usually Illegal

Burning household trash has been a common practice for many years. Past generations, whose weekly trash was mostly clean or waxed paper and cardboard, found burning to be an efficient and satisfying way to keep house. Perhaps as children, we watched in awe as a large heap of our family's trash was reduced to a small pile of clean, white ash. But times have changed. Today we know that burning household trash creates dioxin and other toxic substances.

Gone forever are smoldering town dumps that once attracted bears, raccoons and other wildlife. These have been replaced by sanitary landfills, refuse drop-off sites and curbside collection. Local recycling programs now collect and sort paper, plastic, glass, cardboard and other materials that were once burned as waste.

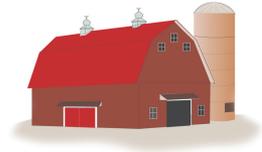


Burning trash should be a thing of the past. But we still find ourselves putting trash containing the plastics, inks and foils used in modern packaging into the burn barrel, and striking the match. Burning household trash, whether in an open pit, burn barrel or household incinerator, is unhealthy, unneighborly, unnecessary and usually illegal. It's time to scrap those burn barrels.



**Burn Barrels:**  
Unhealthy,  
Unneighborly,  
Unnecessary,  
and  
Usually Illegal

► **Who’s Still Burning Trash?**



Most cities enforce ordinances that prohibit burning household trash. Residents of small towns, rural hamlets and farms are much more likely to burn their trash. A survey of 12 northwestern Wisconsin counties found that 37% of households and 70% of farms regularly burn trash. Convenience and avoiding the cost of trash collection were the reasons most often given for burning trash.

*By Not Burning, You’ll Help:*

- ✓ Reduce air pollution.
- ✓ Reduce health risks.
- ✓ Keep your neighborhood cleaner.

► **Burn Barrels are Unhealthy**

Burning common household trash in a burn barrel, incinerator or open fire produces a black, foul-smelling smoke that irritates the nose and eyes. Burning trash in open fires or household incinerators creates relatively low temperatures, which release toxic substances from plastics, inks, foils and other packaging materials into the air. The list of toxic ingredients in the smoke from burning household trash can include any or all of the following:

**Arsenic**  
**Benzene**  
**Carbon Monoxide**  
**Dioxin**  
**Formaldehyde**  
**Hydrochloric Acid**



**Hydrogen Cyanide**  
**Lead**  
**Mercury**  
**Nitrogen Oxides**  
**Particulate Matter**  
**Styrene**

Health risks from burning trash include emphysema, asthma, birth defects and cancer. These risks are highest for people closest to the fire – the people who burn trash and their families. And, once these chemicals find their way into our fields and streams, they can also find their way into our food supply.



### ► **Burn Barrels are Unnecessary**

At one time, burning was done to discourage pests, rodents and other animals attracted to accumulated trash in dumps. Or perhaps burning was considered more convenient than hauling it to the dump.



Today, every community has regularly scheduled trash pick-ups or a refuse drop-off site. With today's recycling programs, much of the combustible material in household trash (paper, cardboard and plastic) is collected and reprocessed.

This leaves very little trash to burn, and that amount can be further reduced through composting. Once the valuable portion of trash has been removed, it is now both convenient and practical to have it collected for disposal in a sanitary landfill.

#### ***Instead of Burning:***

- ✓ **Have your trash collected for disposal in a landfill, or drop-off site.**
- ✓ **Recycle paper, cardboard, plastics, glass and metal.**
- ✓ **Compost food waste.**



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### ► **Burn Barrels are Unneighborly**

Smoke from burn barrels and other open-trash burning is an aggravation to neighbors. Odors and soot can travel long distances, entering houses or soiling laundry hanging out to dry. Be a good neighbor – don't burn your trash.



### ► **Burning Trash is Usually Illegal**

Wisconsin state rules [Administrative Code NR 429] prohibit the burning of most materials including rubber, plastic and asphaltic materials (shingles, tar paper). Many local government units have even stricter ordinances that prohibit or severely restrict open burning of any kind.

### ► **What can be Burned?**

In addition to cooking, camping, and ceremonial fires, burning of trees, brush and weeds is permitted if consistent with local regulations and fire safety. Always check with your local fire department or fire warden before burning. About one-third of all Wisconsin forest fires are caused by someone's open burning.

For more information on open burning, visit this Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website address:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/OpenBurning>  
Or contact your nearest DNR service center.



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