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## Burn Barrel FAQ

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### What is the Illinois Law on Open Burning?

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Cooking and campfires are allowed either on private property or in public areas where specified. Open Burning of garbage is prohibited in Illinois. Burning of household waste (except garbage) is permitted only on the premises where it is generated and outside any "restricted area" (defined as any city, village, or incorporated township plus a zone extending one mile beyond the boundaries when there is a population of 1,000 or more). To burn safely, do not overload the burn barrel, so more oxygen can reach the fire.

*Note: State law does not override local prohibitions or limitations on open burning.*

Household Waste is defined as waste generated from single home, but does not include landscape waste, garbage (food waste, food or plastic packaging and diapers), trade waste (construction debris, roofing materials), used furniture, appliances or automobile parts.

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### Why should I be concerned about the open burning of household waste?

The nature of household trash has changed over the past fifty years. Today, bleached paper, synthetics, plastic packaging or plastic products and printed materials with toxic chemicals make up a large portion of society's waste. These items contain chemical dyes, coatings, pigments and chlorine that can form even more toxic chemicals when burned. Chlorine is present in most household waste, including paper products.

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## What pollutants do burn barrels release?

Particulates, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide represent the largest portion of pollutants (of an estimated 5,000 tons annually) emitted from open burning of household waste. Because burn barrels receive little oxygen, they create low temperature fires that generate other toxic pollutants as well, such as benzene, styrene oxide, formaldehyde, dioxins and furans. Dioxins are produced in burn barrels at levels more than two times greater (per ton of refuse) than from municipal incinerators. Some metals (e.g., lead, cadmium and chromium) are also released.

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## Can these chemical emissions harm my family's health?

Yes. These pollutants are released into the air where they can be inhaled by those closest to or downwind from the source. They also deposit on leafy plants that are eaten by livestock. Dioxin accumulates in animal fat and is passed through meat and dairy products to humans.

Depending on how long and how often you are exposed, certain pollutants can harm the lungs, kidneys, the nervous system and the liver. Short-term exposure can aggravate asthma and affect other respiratory conditions. Long-term exposure can lead to an increased risk of cancer, heart disease, and respiratory, reproductive and developmental problems.

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## What are dioxins?

Dioxins are highly toxic, long-lasting organic compounds. They are dangerous even at extremely low levels and have been linked to several health problems, including cancer and developmental and reproductive disorders.

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## How are dioxins formed?

Dioxins are formed when products containing carbon and chlorine are burned. Even very small amounts of chlorine can produce dioxins. Because burn barrels do not have the same strict controls as municipal incinerators, barrel burning releases significant amounts of dioxins. Trying to prevent dioxins from forming by separating out items high in chlorine content is not effective, since low levels of chlorine are present in most household trash.

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## How are we exposed to dioxins?

Dioxins accumulate in the food chain. Airborne dioxins can settle onto feed crops, which are then eaten by domestic meat and dairy animals. Dioxins also can settle on water or enter waterways through soil erosion. These dioxins accumulate in the fats of animals, and then in humans when we consume meat, fish, and dairy products.

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## Why should I stop burning my trash?

- Burn barrels are the most significant remaining source of dioxin in the U.S. and produce a variety of other toxins.
- Your individual choices impact the quality of everyone's food supply.
- Your health and the health of your family and neighbors may depend on it.
- There is a risk of forest fires in some areas from uncontrolled open burning.
- You may be breaking the law.

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## Why do people burn?

In many parts of Illinois—urban as well as rural areas—burning has been the waste disposal method of choice for a significant part of the population for many years. People choose to burn for a variety of reasons, including:

- Waste collection service is unavailable or inconvenient in their area.
- They want to avoid the cost of waste collection services and/or landfill fees.
- They want to keep wastes out of the landfill.

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## My neighbor is burning and the smoke is coming into my house, can it hurt me?

Yes. People with respiratory problems like emphysema and asthma should avoid smoke filled areas. In addition, the smoke will contain carbon monoxide and hazardous air pollutants like formaldehyde. Your neighbor probably doesn't realize the smoke is going into your house. Ask them to delay burning until the wind is blowing in a different direction.

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## What can I do to help?

**Reduce** – extra packaging by buying in bulk. Avoid buying disposable items: buy durable, repairable items

**Reuse** – donate unwanted clothing, furniture, toys and electronics to friends or charities. Give old magazines and books to hospitals or nursing homes. Repair rather than discard or replace.


**Recycle** – junk mail, magazines, newspapers, office paper, cardboard, aluminum, tin, metal and acceptable plastics. Return plastic bags to stores to recycle them.

**Compost** – Food and lawn and garden waste.

Properly Dispose of Waste – Don't litter or dump illegally. Use a waste collection service or take your waste to a transfer station, convenience center, or local landfill. Check with your local officials to learn about collection service and drop-off sites in your community.

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## How do I arrange trash pickup?


Look in your local yellow pages under "garbage service", "waste management", "garbage", "trash pickup", or contact your  [county solid waste and recycling coordinator](#).

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## What about leaf burning?

Even though leaf burning may be legal in many localities, it is not a good way to dispose of fallen leaves. Instead of burning your leaves, you can:

- Compost leaves and plant clippings. You can reduce the volume of leaves significantly by shredding them before composting.
- Chip brush and clean wood to make mulch or decorative chips.
- Use municipal collection services if available, or ask your local municipality to offer such a service or a drop-off center.

 [Where is the nearest landscape waste compost facility?](#)

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## What about burning business waste?

Open burning of waste in a burn barrel or otherwise by a business is illegal in the state of Illinois except for landscape waste generated on the property or agricultural waste under limited circumstances. However, local laws may limit open burning of landscape waste

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