

BACKYARD BURNING

Every spring and fall, burning is an issue in Waukesha County. Some municipalities don't offer yard waste collection services and residents may decide to burn yard waste. Some people also burn garbage and other items that might create a health hazard.

Residents should be aware of the consequences of back yard burning and the alternatives that exist. There are better ways to manage yard waste.

(People burn in open pits, burn barrels, or backyard incinerators. Backyard burnings lack the proper temperature to prevent release of dioxins and other harmful chemicals.)

Things to remember:

- Check with your municipality- In Waukesha County each municipality has its own ordinances regarding burning. You should contact your local town hall or police department if a neighbor is illegally burning.
- Compost as an alternative- Leaves, grass clippings, and brush and branches can be composted in piles to create a rich soil.
- Consider alternative landscaping- Learn how to design and landscape your yard for less maintenance, less water use and less waste.
- Open burning creates health hazards and is NOT an environmentally sound way to dispose of leaves and garden debris.(See [DNR's](#) page on burning health hazards)

Why Should I be Concerned?

Dioxin	Human carcinogen (causes cancer) and toxic compound that suppresses the immune system and effects reproduction and development. A bioaccumulant (stays in the body). Released by burning garbage, treated lumber and tires.
Asthma	Particulate matter released during burning can aggravate asthma.
Smoke and Haze	Lower air quality for you and neighbors
Greenhouse Gases	Trees spend all summer converting carbon dioxide (CO ₂) to oxygen (O ₂) and storing the carbon in leaves. By burning the leaves you release the CO ₂ back in the atmosphere. That means less oxygen in our air to breathe and more CO ₂ giving us hotter days through global warming.
Odors	Not everyone likes the smell of burning leaves. Nobody likes the smell of burning garbage!

Special Items - DO NOT BURN!

Item	Pollutants Released during Burning	Alternatives
Railroad Ties	Arsenic, Dioxins,	Landfill
Treated Lumber	Arsenic, cancer causing agents, particulate matter	Landfill or reuse
Magazines	Toxic chemicals and heavy metals, CO	Recycle
Tires	Dioxins, acid gases, lead, CO, cancer causing agents.	Landfill
Aerosol Cans	Chemicals in the can make new toxic gases when burned.	Empty and recycle If full take to HHW site.

See the [EPA](#) website on backyard burning for more information.

[Illinois EPA](#) also has information on burn barrels.