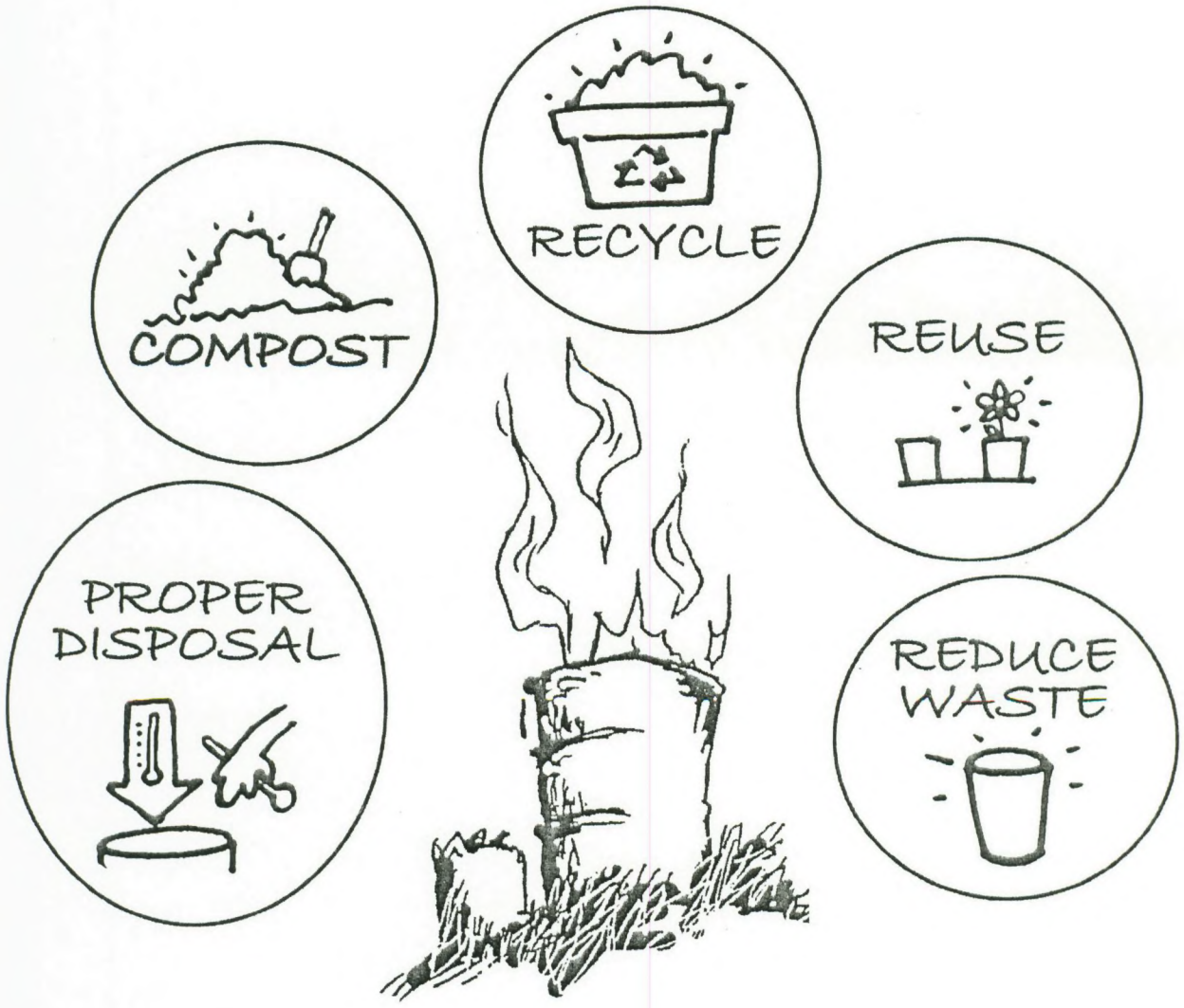
Indiana Department of Environmental Management IDEM

Thinking about burning trash or yard waste in Indiana?



First, consider the alternatives.

Smoke damages health!

All smoke contains harmful pollutants, some of which are toxic. These pollutants can harm your family's and neighbors' health and the environment. This pollution doesn't stay on your property. It drifts away and other people suffer. Because smoke is usually close to the ground, it is breathed in before it disperses. In addition, fires and smoke often create a nuisance and can destroy property when they get out of hand.

Perhaps you know someone who has asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, pneumonia or allergies. They'll tell you how smoke makes breathing especially difficult. Older people, those with lung problems, and pregnant or nursing women may suffer more serious health effects than other adults.

Repeated exposure to smoke can also cause developmental problems in children and increase the chances of getting cancer. Even healthy children and adults are affected by small particles, molds, fungi and chemical pollutants in smoke.

Open burning can cause...

- ✗ Eye, nose, and throat irritatio
- ✗ Lung irritation and congestior
- ✗ Shortness of breath and coug
- ✗ Stomach or intestinal upset
- ✗ Headaches or memory loss
- ✗ Skin irritations or burns
- ✗ Eye damage

Smoke from burning five pounds of leaves contains about one pound of air pollution.

It is ALWAYS illegal to open burn garbage!

Safer alternatives exist statewide. That's why Indiana law restricts open burning.

In counties where air quality meets state and federal health standards, state law permits certain residential open burning of "clean wood products," such as leaves and branches, as long as the burning is done according to the rules (see page 4 for a summary of the rules.)

Local ordinances more strict than the state's open burning laws exist in many communities. If this is the case, the more restrictive requirement applies. If you choose to burn clean wood products despite the potential environmental and health impacts, you should check with your local fire department or health department for information on local ordinances.

It is always against the law for citizens to open burn trash such as household waste, plastic, batteries, rubber, disposable diapers and painted or stained wood. In general, businesses may not open burn anything.

Your town, city, or county may have an ordinance that is more restrictive than the state's open burning law. If so, you must comply with that ordinance also. Before you open burn, call your local fire department, government office or health department to find out.

Burning contributes to harmful ground level ozone!

BAD OZONE

People who live in or near larger metropolitan areas can be affected by a severe air pollution problem: ground level ozone, or smog. It affects outlying suburbs and rural areas as well as the big cities.

In other areas of the state, ozone problems are not as severe, but ozone pollution exists all over Indiana.

We hear a lot about depletion of the ozone layer in the stratosphere. This kind of ozone protects us from harmful radiation from the sun. Stratospheric ozone is good, but ground-level ozone is harmful.

When people think about ground-level ozone, they usually picture a thick layer of smog over Los Angeles. They don't think of a sunny, hot, Midwest summer day with a hazy blue sky. But, ozone pollution exists here, too, unless we do something about it.

Ozone is created in the lower atmosphere when volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and other air pollutants react in the presence of sunlight. Open burning, vehicle exhaust, industrial smoke stacks, gas pumps and many other sources give off VOCs.

Regulations exist to reduce this serious air pollution because it can cause or worsen respiratory, heart and other health problems. It also deteriorates rubber, corrodes metal and damages crops and forests.

Residential burning ban reduces ozone in four Indiana counties.

Because of unacceptably high ozone levels in **Lake, Porter, Clark** and **Floyd** counties, residential open burning in incorporated areas, including yard waste, is illegal. The law prohibiting open burning is part of the regional ozone-cutting effort. Other clean air measures involve industries and motor vehicles.

There are rules for safe residential burning.

Because of high regional ozone levels, **no household or yard waste may be burned by residents in incorporated areas of Lake, Porter, Clark or Floyd counties.** In all other counties where ozone levels are safer, open burning of clean wood products may be permitted according to the following rules. This brochure should be considered a summary of the rules and is not to be relied upon as legal advice. Please refer to 326 IAC 4-1 and IC 13-17-9 for state regulations (this is available online at **www.in.gov/legislative/ic_iac**). Your town, city or county may also have an ordinance that could be more restrictive than the state laws. Call your local health department, fire department or government offices before burning.

According to state law, these rules must always be followed:

- ✓ Only clean wood products may be burned. Wood products coated with stain, paint, glue or other coatings are not safe to burn.
- ✓ Burning must be done during safe weather conditions, not during high winds or on pollution alert days or ozone action days.
- ✓ Fires must be attended until completely extinguished.
- ✓ Burning must be done during daylight hours and extinguished prior to sunset.
- ✓ Fire fighting equipment adequate for the size of the fire must be nearby.
- ✓ Material may only be burned in a noncombustible and ventilated container, such as a metal drum with enclosed sides and bottom. Burning on the ground is illegal.
- ✓ Open burning is not allowed at mobile home parks, apartment or condominium complexes or buildings of more than four dwelling units.
- ✓ Fires must be extinguished if they create a fire hazard, nuisance, pollution problem or threat to public health.
- ✓ Burning must comply with all other federal, state and local laws, rules and ordinances.

If you witness illegal burning...

Call (800) 451-6027, and ask for extension 3-0178 (in Indiana), or (317) 233-0178, and have a copy of this brochure sent to the violator. Education is the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's preferred method of achieving environmental compliance. In cases where open burning laws are ignored, enforcement options exist. IDEM encourages towns, cities and counties to adopt burning ordinances because enforcement is often more effective at the local level.

Violators may have to pay a fine or pay the costs of having a fire extinguished. If the fire escapes, the violator may have to cover property damage costs.

Never burn toxic materials!

Burning toxic materials is illegal, and extremely dangerous!

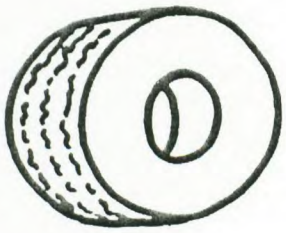
Burning household trash and outdoor waste, such as plastics and building materials, is illegal because it's extremely dangerous. Even if you take special precautions to protect against smoke exposure, pollutants will be left behind in the ashes. These pollutants pose a risk to health and contaminate soil and water. Burning tires, treated wood or asbestos is illegal and particularly dangerous.

Tires

We need tires for transportation. But their resilience and indestructibility make disposal difficult. If you've ever seen the thick, black plumes of smoke from a tire fire, you know why state law prohibits burning tires.

When tires burn, they release toxic gases into the air and leave behind a hazardous, oily residue that can pollute streams and groundwater.

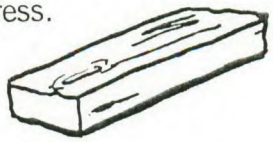
Tire fires are difficult to extinguish and can burn out of control for months.



Treated wood

To protect wood against weather and insects, some wood products are saturated or coated with arsenic, chromium, copper or creosote, a yellowish to greenish-brown liquid made with tar. Typically, treated wood has a greenish dark brown or black color.

Smoke from burning creosote is especially irritating. For health and safety concerns, **do not burn wood scraps, old decks or unwanted landscaping timbers.** Documented instances prove that exposure to treated wood smoke can cripple a person. Next time you buy material for outdoor building projects, choose recycled-plastic lumber or naturally rot-resistant woods, such as cedar, redwood, or cypress.



Asbestos

Many building materials contain asbestos because of its fire-retardant properties. Some examples are asphalt roofing shingles, vinyl siding, insulation, plastics, wiring and floor tile. Microscopic asbestos fibers in the air can be inhaled. Once in your lungs, asbestos fibers can cause lung cancer and other respiratory diseases.

Before any structure is intentionally burned or demolished, it should be checked by a licensed asbestos inspector. For more information, call the Indiana Department of Enviromental Management Asbestos Section at (888) 574-8150.

What kind of open burning does the state allow?

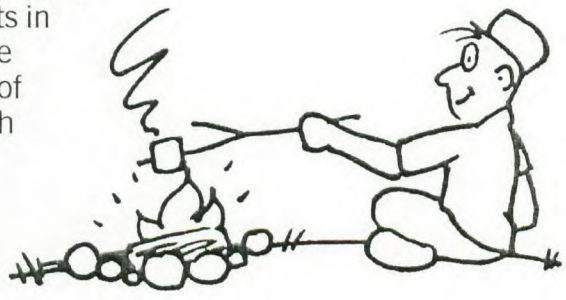
State law allows several open burning activities, subject to conditions that will minimize the impact on air quality. Some examples of permissible burning are listed below. This brochure should be considered a summary of the rules and is not to be relied upon as legal advice. Please refer to 326 IAC 4-1 and IC 13-17-9 for state regulations. Other burning activities may be granted special approval by the Indiana Department of Enviromental Management. Call (800) 451-6027, and ask for ext. 3-0178 (in Indiana), or (317) 233-0178 for more information on approvals. No approval will be granted for residential burning in Clark, Floyd, Lake or Porter counties.

Recreational or ceremonial fires, such as barbecues, campfires and fires for scouting activities.

These fires may burn at night, but may be fueled only by clean wood products, paper, charcoal or clean burning petroleum products, such as lighter fluid. As an alternative, IDEM recommends using an electric lighter, charcoal chimney or newspaper as a lighting aid. If you're planning to light a bonfire, notify your local fire and health departments in advance. There are limits on the size of fires and the length of time they may burn. These fires may not be used for disposal purposes.

Some types of burning of vegetation from a farm, an orchard, nursery, cemetery, tree farm, a drainage ditch, or agricultural land in an unincorporated area.

This exemption is for maintenance purposes rather than when there is a change in the use of land. There are several restrictions on this type of open burning. Please see Indiana Administrative Code 326 IAC 4-1 and Indiana Code 13-17-9 for the laws regarding this exemption.



A variance is required to burn vegetation for wildlife, habitat maintenance, forest and natural area management, and fire fighting or prevention unless specifically exempted under the agricultural provisions of IC 13-17-9.

The appropriate amount of fire, applied at just the right time, is as necessary as rain and sunshine to the forest and animals that live there. Prescribed fires can benefit Indiana's woodlands and reduce the threat of wildfire. However, many factors are carefully considered before prescribed burning takes place. These include the social, economic, legal and ecological effects a burn may have in a particular area. Generally, only the Department of Natural Resources and certain federal land management agencies may conduct this type of burning without seeking a variance.

So, what's the best way to manage waste?

Compost your leaves, grass, weeds, brush, kitchen scraps and other organic waste. The resulting humus is "green gold" that protects soil from heat and drought and returns nutrients to the earth that are vital to healthy lawns, gardens and croplands. Fibrous plants and large leaves may have to be chopped before adding them to the compost pile. To counteract acidic ingredients such as oak leaves, add plenty of green waste such as grass or manure. Decomposition requires air, so turning the pile every few days will hasten the process.

Reduce waste by cutting down on what you buy. Buy in bulk when possible and avoid overpackaged products.

Reuse, sell or give away items you no longer need. Consider chipping tree limbs to use as mulch.

Recycle everything possible. Glass and plastic beverage containers, metals, newspaper and corrugated cardboard at a minimum are collected for recycling in most communities. Recycle leaves by mulching them with your lawn mower and leave them on the ground rather than raking them up. This saves you time and fertilizes the soil.

Properly dispose of waste you can't avoid or recycle. Take it to a sanitary landfill, trasnfer station or compost facility. Or use a yard waste or trash service available in your community.

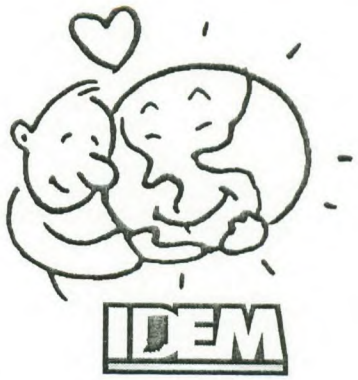
For more informations on how to compost and recycle, see **www.in.gov/idem/oppta/recycling/** and **www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/compost/index.html.**

Remember, you can make a difference. Indiana's environmental future begins with you.

The Indiana Department of Environmental Management discourages all burning of waste. More environmentally sound options, such as source reduction, recycling and composting, exist statewide. **Contact your local solid waste management district for more information.**

Call (800) 451-6027, and ask for ext. 2-8172 (in Indiana), or (317) 232-8172 to get the number of your solid waste management district or to find out more about pollution prevention and waste reduction.

On the Web at: www.in.gov/idem/oppta/recycling/swmd/index.html



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