Air Pollution Control in Vermont

Backyard Burning

So You Want To Burn Something?

Open-air burning is sort of a tradition. You know, you put some brush, leaves, garbage, junk from the attic, or maybe construction debris in a big pile in a field or in a burn barrel and light a match. Disposal fees at the local landfill go up in smoke.

A lot of other things go up in smoke, too – things that can cause serious health problems and damage the environment. That's why the Legislature, through the state Agency of Natural Resources, has established regulations to control air pollution. There simply isn't enough clean air left to do whatever we want. We must protect ourselves from the harmful effects of outdated "traditions" such as open-air burning.

Roughly 7 to 9 percent of what you burn ends up as air pollution, with some pollutants being highly toxic. And that figure does not include the large amount of carbon dioxide, a common "greenhouse gas," that is given off.

There are many effects of open-air burning, some of which are more immediate than others. The smoke from your fire might not bother you, but it could be a real nuisance or a serious health threat to your neighbor, especially if he or she has any respiratory illnesses. And, a variety of illnesses can actually be caused, over time, by air pollution, including cancer, emphysema, asthma, and chronic bronchitis.

Let's face it: A lot of open burning just isn't necessary. Brush can be composted, piled up for wildlife, or just left to rot.

Isn't There Anything I Can Still Burn?

Yes, certain kinds of open burning are still allowed if they don't create a nuisance and if they are not prohibited by local ordinances. These types of fires are *allowed*:

- Campfires and outdoor barbecues
- Burning of leaves, brush, deadwood, tree cuttings, and weeds from your property
- Natural wood bonfires on festive occasions

However, it is *illegal to burn*:

- Paper and cardboard
- Tires and other rubber products
- Treated, painted, or finished wood
- Tarpaper or asphalt shingles
- Plastics
- Garbage

Think again before you light that match. Many recycling centers around the state accept paper, cardboard, and various plastics. Open burning is simply a very poor way of getting rid of combustible trash.

What Must I Do If I'm Planning A Burn?

You do not need a general air pollution permit for allowable fires. However, in many cases you will need a local permit – from either your town or the local forest fire warden. Open burning is considered a nuisance, and officials may establish rules to lessen the nuisance. Check with local officials if you have any questions.

If you're considering burning large quantities of materials, you might need a permit from the Air Quality and Climate Division of the state Department of Environmental Conservation (802-828-1288). A permit may or may not be issued, depending on the individual situation.

The Vermont Air Quality and Climate Division was established to maintain and improve the quality of Vermont's air. Clean air will safeguard our citizens' health and safety, promote economic and social development, and enhance enjoyment of the state's natural attractions.

The program described in this pamphlet is one of several administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation as part of this mission.

Questions?

For more information about backyard burning or other air pollution issues, or to receive more copies of this pamphlet, call the Air Quality and Climate Division at (802) 828-1288; or visit our Web site at http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/air

For information on recyclingcontact your local solid waste district office.

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