



Backyard Burning: The Facts



Definition—Backyard burning is the burning of household trash on your property. This trash includes paper, plastics, and yard trimmings. Backyard burning is also known as *open burning* because pollution goes directly into the air at ground level, instead of passing through a smoke stack like in *waste incineration*, burning in a properly built facility at controlled high temperatures.

Health Hazards

- When waste is burned at ground level smoke stays in the local area, smoke from open burning can cause breathing difficulties (especially for people with asthma).
- Open burning releases particulates--very fine particles of smoke, dust, and fumes. Particulates stay in the air for days and enter deep into the lungs.
- Particulates cause eye irritation.
- Toxic pollutants such as dioxins can be released during open burning. These pollutants may cause cancer or other serious health problems

Environmental Hazards—Ash from open burning contains heavy metals such as chromium, lead, and cadmium. These metals can be transported by rain water and contaminate ground and surface water systems. If ashes go on a garden then the vegetables can absorb these heavy metals.

According to the Law

- Tennessee regulates open burning.
- All counties except Shelby, Davidson, Hamilton, and Knox can burn vegetation (grown on own property), paper, and cardboard without a permit on your property. This is only if there is no waste collection service. The burning cannot bother the neighbors.
- You are not allowed to burn tires, plastics, paint, or household trash.

What you should do instead of backyard burning

- Avoid products with extra packaging so there is less garbage to begin with!
- Recycle as much as possible!
- Make a compost heap in your backyard.
- Take materials to a landfill or convenience station.