

## ***Open Burning is the Single Greatest Cause of Wildfires in NYS***

According to the NYSDEC, open burning is also the single greatest cause of wildfires in New York. Data from NYSDEC's Forest Protection Division<sup>3</sup> shows that debris burning accounted for about 36% of wildfires in the state between 1985 and 2009, which is more than twice the next most-cited cause. Since the burn ban went into effect, fire department data for 2010 and 2011 indicated a 26% reduction in wildfires during the burn ban period when compared to the previous 10 years. In addition, 86% of all communities across the state had a reduction of wildfires compared with the previous five years.

NYSDEC indicates that: "Burning household trash is dangerous on several levels. It can release potentially dangerous compounds, dioxins and other potential carcinogens from materials burned in backyard fires. And it is the largest single cause of wildfires in the state."



## ***"But I don't burn anything dangerous"***

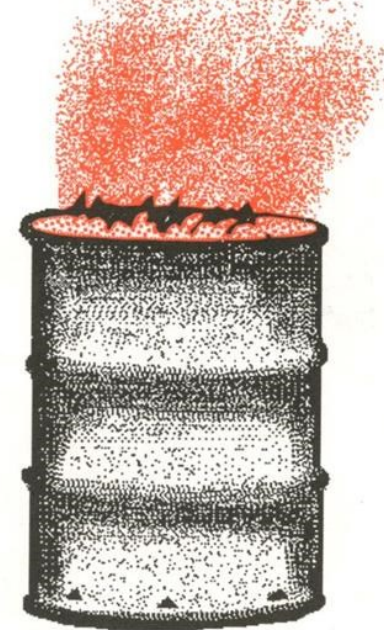
Plain old household waste contains materials that may pose a danger to your health if improperly burned. Old paint, painted and treated wood, used oil, light bulbs, batteries and other discarded products may contain mercury, lead and other heavy metals.

Plastics burned at low temperatures give off toxic and cancer causing chemicals. If you can smell the smoke, you are exposing yourself to potentially harmful pollutants.

### ***For More Information***

1. **Open Fires Part 215** — [www.dec.ny.gov/regs/4261.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/regs/4261.html)
2. **Evaluation of Emissions from the Open Burning of Household Waste in Barrels**— [www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/burn/trashburn1.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/burn/trashburn1.pdf)
3. **Residential Brush Burning Ban Season** — [www.dec.ny.gov/press/80920.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/press/80920.html)
4. **Don't Trash Our Air** — [www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/32060.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/32060.html)
5. **Does Burning Trash Make it Disappear** — [www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/air/trash.htm](http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/outdoors/air/trash.htm)
6. **Outdoor Air** — [epa.gov/oaqps001/community/details/barrelburn\\_addl\\_info.html](http://epa.gov/oaqps001/community/details/barrelburn_addl_info.html)
7. **Open Burning Regulations** — [www.dec.ny.gov/docs/air\\_pdf/factsheet.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/air_pdf/factsheet.pdf)

# Is This Your Idea of Taking Out the Trash?



Produced by the **Cornell Waste Management Institute**, a program in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at Cornell University, dedicated to basic research and technical assistance on a wide range of solid waste issues.

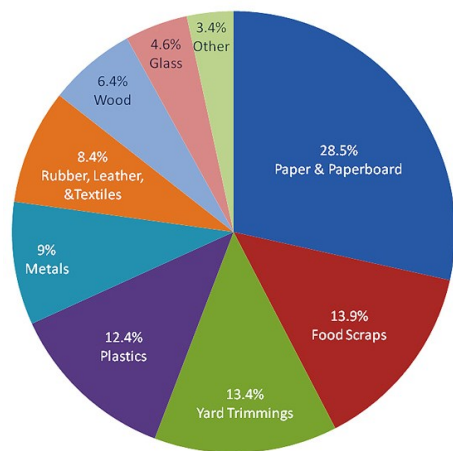
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# Before you burn your garbage consider this...

## *New York State Open Burning Laws*

New York State Regulation Part 215<sup>1</sup> prohibits burning household trash or leaf piles at all times statewide. In addition, all residential brush burning is prohibited annually during the state's historically high fire-risk period from March 16 through May 14. Residents of towns with a population less than 20,000 may burn downed limbs and branches less than 8 feet in length and 6 inches in diameter on their own property, beginning May 15 to the following March 15. However, some towns, primarily in and around the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, are designated as "fire towns" where open burning is prohibited at all times without a permit from NYSDEC.



*2010 total municipal solid waste generation (by material).*

*200 million tons (before recycling).*

*Source: US EPA*

## *There is a better way!*

- **Reduce.** Avoid generating waste. Purchase items that are needed and select products with the least packaging.
- **Reuse.** Buy products that are durable, can be re-used, and re-fill containers when possible. Donate items in good condition to charitable organizations for reuse.
- **Recycle.** Separate recyclables from trash to contribute to local recycling collection or drop-off programs. Check with your community program to see which materials can be recycled.
- **Compost.** For your organic wastes, such as grass clippings, leaves and food wastes, compost instead. It's safer and easier than burning and yields a useful end product that can be used in gardens.

Ultimately, there will be leftovers—garbage—that can't be readily reused, recycled or composted and should be managed in the most responsible manner possible. Whether your garbage is sent to a landfill, an incinerator, a composting facility or a recycling center, it poses less of a danger to health and the environment than if it is burned in the backyard.

## *Open Burning Creates Air Pollution and Toxic Ash*

According to the US EPA<sup>2</sup>, of all the toxic air pollutants, "products of incomplete combustion" pose the greatest risk of cancer through the release of carcinogens such as dioxins and furans.

Trash containing plastics, polystyrene, pressure-treated and painted wood, and bleached or colored papers produce harmful chemicals when burned. In addition to dioxins and furans, burning trash emits arsenic, carbon monoxide, benzene, styrene, formaldehyde, lead, and hydrogen cyanide, among others.

Of course, there is no air pollution control in open burning. Even worse, in a barrel temperatures are too low to assure complete destruction of hazardous compounds formed as plastics and other materials burn.

Metals that are not carried by the smoke are left behind in the ash. This ash should not be put on gardens or dumped indiscriminately.

