NY POLICY on BURNING AGRICULTURAL PLASTICS

Regulations prohibiting open burning of household and agricultural trash went into effect October 2009.

Since then, plastics used in agriculture—e.g., horticultural mulch film, drip tape, dairy bunk silo covers, pesticide containers, packaging, etc.—may not be discarded by burning in barrels or open fires.

Farmers are still permitted to burn brush and other organic agricultural wastes if the material is generated on-site, can be fully burned within 24 hours, and if the fire is located on at least five acres of agricultural land.

But farmers may not burn construction debris, old fencing, packaging materials, or other trash.


Why?

Trash fires are the primary cause of wildfires. They generate harmful emissions: highly toxic dioxins and particulates that lodge in the lungs. The “open burning” regulations protect health, the food supply, and air quality.

Questions:

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Factsheet details the open burning regulations (www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/58519.html).

Report violations with a call to the 24-hour TIPP hotline (1-800-TIPP DEC), email to the TIPP Dispatcher <r5dsptch@gw.dec.state.ny.us>, or by contacting a DEC Environmental Conservation Officer (ECO).

Find your local EOC by calling the DEC Dispatch Center at 1-877-457-5680 or linking to local EOC contact information on the DEC website: www.dec.ny.gov/about/621.html.

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RAPP

RECYCLING AGRICULTURAL PLASTICS PROJECT

Update for CCE Educators

Large amounts of plastics are used these days to grow, process, and store agricultural crops. Most of it is discarded after one use. Very little is being recycled, in part because used agricultural plastics are often cumbersome to handle and rarely meet the specifications of plastics recycling markets. Few plastics processors are set up to handle them.

The Recycling Agricultural Plastics Project (RAPP), based at Cornell University, is working to change this picture by developing infrastructure, protocols and markets to recycle these difficult materials.

Since 2009, RAPP has coordinated the collection of more than one million pounds of used plastic that would otherwise go into landfills, be burned in open fires on-farms, or get left behind in the fields.

This accomplishment has been made possible by collaborative efforts of numerous agencies, organizations, businesses, and farmers across NYS.

Agricultural plastics recycled from NYS farms are now being made into sidewalk pavers, plastic lumber, oil, and other products!

RAPP field staff and local partners are fanning out across NYS to recruit participants, train local leaders, and promote Best Management Practices to keep plastic in condition to be recycled. RAPP continues to strive toward our goal of sustainable, efficient and cost-effective recycling accessible to all New York farmers. RAPP needs YOUR help.

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Recycling Agricultural Plastics Project (RAPP) - Cornell, Ithaca NY
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On facebook: Recycling Agricultural Plastics Project (RAPP)
HOW RAPP WORKS

Staff of the NYS Recycling Agricultural Plastics Project (RAPP) work with local partners to recruit participants to the recycling program, train local leaders, and develop individualized “best management plans” for farmers to use in preparing their plastics for recycling.

With about 35,000 farms in NYS and only a few RAPP staff, the program relies on close collaborations with Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations (CCE), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), solid waste and recycling agencies and businesses, and others across the state to help spread the recycling message, teach best management protocols, and carry out the collection of plastics.

Thus far, most of the film plastic collected for recycling has been baled—either on individual farms or at centralized collection points—using one of RAPP’s mobile plastics balers. With farm staff loading the baler and RAPP staff or partners operating it, 1000 pounds of film can be compacted into a dense, square, stackable bale in about 30 minutes. With experience and additional training, farm staff are also approved to operate the balers. Finished bales are accumulated locally until container loads are ready to move to market. As the recycling program grows, alternative collection models will proliferate.

RAPP strives to close the loop by recycling old products into new within our geographic region. To help sustain this and other recycling programs, RAPP encourages everyone to Buy Recycled!

TALKING POINTS FOR CCE EDUCATORS

to help spread the word about recycling when visiting with agricultural producers

Mention plastics recycling when talking with farmers, landscapers, and others who sell or use film or rigid plastics to grow or process agricultural crops (e.g., horticultural crops, maple syrup, animal feed).

Key points to convey:

- Recycling plastic is a good alternative to illegal burning, messy dumping and expensive landfill tipping fees.
- RAPP can recycle many types of agricultural plastics.
  → But only if the used plastic has been prepared for recycling and local collection infrastructure is in place!
- Step 1 for anyone interested in recycling: Contact RAPP staff (or one of RAPP’s local partners) to develop an individualized “best management plan” (BMP) to prepare plastics for recycling.
- Step 2: Follow the BMPs! It’s essential. The basic BMPs:
  - Keep plastic as clean and dry as possible.
  - Shake out pebbles and clumps of soil.
  - Roll or fold used film plastic into pillow-sized bundles.
  - Store plastic off the ground, out of mud, gravel and grit.
  - Separate different types of used plastic by color and type.
- Step 3: Work with RAPP staff (or with participating Soil and Water Conservation Districts and/or recycling agencies) to arrange for use of a plastics baler. Logistics will vary.
- Step 4: Farm labor is needed to load the baler. All helpers must first be trained and must sign a Liability Release.

RAPP staff and local partners will help at every step on the way! Don’t hesitate to contact RAPP with questions, ideas, or to express interest in becoming involved. If there isn’t a program in your area and you would like to get one going, please let us know. We can work together to make it happen.

RAPP State & Local Contacts

LOCAL CONTACT:

If there is no RAPP representative in your area, contact:

RAPP Program Leader, Lois Levitan, 607-255-4765.
agplasticsrecycling@cornell.edu

NYS Sr. Field Coordinator. Nate Leonard. 607-216-7242. nrl3@cornell.edu

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