



Toxic Dioxin Emissions Cause Maine Legislature To Ban Back Yard Trash Burning

Health concerns a top priority for Maine legislators

Concern for the health of Maine citizens was a high priority for Legislators this session when they voted to prohibit back yard trash burning. The bill, introduced by Senators Treat and Representative Cowger, was to reduce the formation and release of dioxin to Maine's environment.

The amount of plastics in household trash and the incomplete combustion and low temperatures characteristic of burn barrels, result in the formation of dioxins and furans.

A recent inventory of dioxin air emissions in Maine revealed that back yard burning is responsible for

*Changes in the composition of our wastes
have contributed to an increase in the
health risks of backyard burning.*

more than 25% of the dioxins released to Maine air. It is, in fact, the number one source of dioxin air emissions in the state.

A 1997 legislative study by the Departments of Conservation and Environmental Protection documented

the use of almost 10,000 backyard burn barrels across rural Maine. That study also identified the health effects of dioxin emissions from backyard burn barrels.

Growing evidence of health impacts motivate new waste strategy

In addition to aggravating respiratory diseases and suppressing our immune systems, exposure to



toxic smoke from burn barrels can lead to chronic diseases such as emphysema and cancer, reproductive disorders and developmental disorders.

Our legislators voiced the hope for eventually diverting all of our "plastic-waste, dioxin-forming products" to land disposal rather than to incineration. In the meantime, they encourage us all to reevaluate our purchasing habits and consider recyclability when buying modern day consumer products.

"It is the policy of the State to reduce the total release of dioxin and mercury to the environment with the goal of its continued minimization and, where feasible, ultimate elimination." 38MRSA S.2132, SubS.4

Trash Burning Facts

Why is it bad?

Backyard burn barrels and woodstoves produce low temperature fires. Burning trash at these low temperatures produces a lot of smoke and releases many toxic pollutants. Exposure to these pollutants can cause serious health problems.

Why is it better to landfill such products or send your trash to a municipal waste incinerator?

The average dioxin/furan pollutants released to the air from burning 50-900 pounds of household waste in burn barrels is equivalent to:

- * burning 400,000 pounds of waste in a modern, well-controlled incinerator, or
- * zero air emissions when landfilled.

Who can people turn to for help in understanding the new law?

- * Local fire wardens
- * Local CEO's/Selectmen
- * District Forest Fire Rangers

Contact phone number for directory of District Forest Fire Rangers:
1- (800) 750-9777



What are the important changes in the law?

Out-of-door burning of highly combustible trash is prohibited as of September 21, 2001. This includes the burning of trash in campfires, outdoor fireplaces and any type of open or closed container such as burn barrels or unlicensed incinerators.

Out of door burning of construction and demolition debris *containing plastics (vinyl)*, rubber, styrofoam, metal, food wastes or chemicals is also prohibited as of September 21, 2001 .

The law also requires the Department of Environmental Protection to educate people about dioxin-forming products. These are products that contain polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or polyvinyl lidene chloride. When incinerated, these plastics release dioxins to the environment.

What does that mean for our town?

If your municipality has permitted back yard trash burning, it no longer can. The DEP is also asking those who issue open burning permits to help educate the public on the new law. You can do this by providing them the half page 'public flyer' or a copy of this handout. Copies are being provided to municipal officials by the DEP, the State Planning Office and from the Department of Conservation Forest Fire Control Division.

Other than the legal requirements, there are some other key points you could pass along.

* For some people (e.g. rural stores for example) bundling up folded cardboard for disposal or recycling is an effort, but it is well worth it in terms of healthier air.

*Others might think burning in their woodstoves is an option, but it is important to understand that those toxic fumes inside their homes are an even greater health risk for their families. It also greatly increases the chance of chimney fires.

*If trash disposal fees are used in your town, it's a possibility some folks might decide to practice roadside dumping. That's a nasty problem because it attracts rodents and the town can be faced with the costs of cleaning it up. Your local code enforcement officer or sheriff can investigate such problems.

What materials are causing the toxic air problem?

Today's trash contains a number of materials which, when burned, release toxic air pollutants. We need to reduce the toxic nature of our waste stream that goes to incineration because of the potential for serious health effects and contamination of our food supply.

Incineration of PVC plastic waste contributes to dioxin pollution. It is the only plastic that forms significant amounts of dioxin when burned. Even in municipal waste incinerators it is better to avoid burning PVCs to reduce air pollutant levels and toxic ash disposal. Less polluting alternatives exist for most uses of PVC plastic.

Identifying Modern Trash - Dioxin Hazards

Although it is not required, dioxin-forming PVC products may be labeled. Look for the 'plastics recycling label' on the product or its original packaging. Any of these symbols, letters or words may be used: the number 3 inside a triangle next to the letter V; PVC, PVDC; or Vinyl.



* Less Polluting Alternatives to PVC Plastics

PACKAGING

Look for food, cosmetics and household products in containers made from glass, paper or recyclable plastics (#1-PETE, #2-HDPE, #4-LDPE, #5-PP) instead of PVC (#3, V). Look for boxes of film wrap that identify their product as polyethylene (#4) film wrap rather than PVC plastic film wrap

CONSUMER GOODS

Substitute HDPE or PP products for PVC toys (dolls, pools, beach balls), electronics (computers, phones), vinyl tubing, fabrics, etc.

HOME FURNISHINGS

Buy natural wall coverings and linoleum flooring instead of vinyl treatments and; choose nylon or HDPE shower curtains rather than a PVC product.

Source Reduction Strategies

The state is currently studying the feasibility of diverting PVC wastes from incineration to recycling and/or landfilling.

In the meantime, we can make a difference by **RETHINKING** our purchasing habits to avoid putting PVC products in the waste stream.

We consumers can spend less on products with excessive amounts of packaging or non-recyclable materials - by PreCycling when we shop! Let retailers know you prefer to buy containers that are reusable or recyclable. Tell the store manager if you know of alternatives they can provide.

Where can I learn more?

www.mainedep.com
www.recyclemaine.com
www.maineenvironment.org

What choices do we have?

**Reduce, Reuse, Redeem, Return, Refill,
Rebuild, Reclaim, Recycle & Rethink**



PETE



HDPE



LDPE



PP



Maine DEP, Air Bureau
17 State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

PRSR STD
U.S.POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 8
AUGUSTA, MAINE

Dioxin pollution causes legislators to ban open burning of wastes!



Burning trash to save a few dollars isn't worth the price of your family's health.

It's downright dangerous to breathe that smoke.

People face serious health risks including:

- *aggravated asthma & respiratory ailments,*
- *impaired (physical and mental) growth & development of children*
- *substantial cancer risk and increased risks of diabetes, endometriosis and damage to the reproductive system.*

