

## **Backyard burning**

The Oxford Review

Woodstock, ON

25<sup>th</sup> March 2004

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Springtime is just around the corner (we can only hope) and soon the smell of grasses and budding leaves, flowers and melting fields will once again mix with the familiar spring odour of burning plastic wafting across the countryside.

But backyard burning, a culture and way of life in much of rural Ontario, is under the gun this year by an environmental lobby group.

It's not the low-harm brush burning the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) is concerned about, or even newspapers and cardboard so much. It's plastics and other potentially toxic materials that get thrown in without thinking that the group wants to ban.

Total bans have been implemented in several U.S states, and a similar law is being drawn up in British Columbia.

The numbers behind banning backyard burning are frightening enough to warrant concern. Those barrels burning trash produce the largest source of environmentally occurring dioxins in Canada. Burn barrels from 40 households can release the same combined amounts of dioxins as a modern incinerator designed to service up to 120,000 homes.

Despite the wide dispersion of pollution from a burn in a field somewhere in the back 40, the pollutants are still hovering up there in the air with those from the other burns. And that adds up.

Here in southwestern Ontario, rural dwellers, who are fairly targeted as being the most likely to backyard burn, often complain of the air quality from industry damaging their quality of life, sometimes even their crops. Taking a look in their own backyard is a fair comment.

But an enforcement ban is a pipedream of lobbyists despite their best of intentions. Mike Bragg, the country's director of public health, understands...