

Please don't burn your backyard trash

The Caladon Enterprise

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If you care about the air you breathe and your own health, don't burn backyard trash this spring. The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy wants Ontarians to know that in their efforts to clean up post-winter trash, they shouldn't be tempted to burn garbage and trash in backyard fire pits and burn barrels. It's a major source of toxic pollutant emissions which can seriously harm the environment and human health.

Studies by that organization and Environment Canada reveal that one in four Ontario residents regularly use burn barrels at their homes, cottages or farms. Relatively low temperatures and low-oxygen combustion of backyard burn barrels and pits, combined with the tendency to burn plastic bottles, packaging and PVC waste, releases cancer-causing dioxins, furans, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, heavy metals and other pollutants into the air.

These harmful products may seem to go up in smoke and disappear into the air but in the fact they all fall back to earth and contaminate plants, soil and water for miles around.

An American study in 2002 found that backyard burning was the largest source of dioxin and furan emissions in the United States and a similar 2003 Environment Canada report indicated that this practice is the largest remaining single source of environmentally-occurring dioxins in Canada.

Backyard burns from less than 40 households can release the same combined amount of dioxins as a modern incinerator designed for servicing up to 120,000 households. Even more concern arises from the fact that open burning often takes place in rural areas, in close proximity to agricultural operations where pollutants are absorbed by food crops which are then eaten by people.

Some American states such as Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey and New York have banned burning of household and farm trash and the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy urges the Ontario Government to do the same. Many rural and urban municipalities outlaw outside burning of trash as well.

The best solution is reducing the harmful garbage at the source by 'buying smart' and choosing items with less plastic packaging and composting organic kitchen wastes.

When you're cleaning up your property this spring, please resist the temptation to burn it.