

## **Ontario: Backyard trash burning releases toxic chemicals into our air, soil and water**

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Anne Mitchell, Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP), is praising spring cleanup efforts of post-winter trash across the province of Ontario. However, Mitchell wants to alert Ontarians to the environmental and health dangers of burning their plastic bottles, packaging and bags in backyard fire pits and burn barrels. "This is a major source of toxic pollutant emissions that can seriously harm the environment and human health," she said.

Environment Canada studies reveal that one in four Ontarians regularly use burn barrels at their homes or cottages. The relatively low temperatures and low-oxygen combustion of backyard burn barrels, combined with the tendency to burn plastic bags, PVC waste, plastic bottles and containers, releases cancer-causing dioxins, furans, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, benzene, heavy metals and other pollutants into the air. These harmful products fall back to earth and contaminate plants, soil and water into the air.

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A 2002 study from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) states that "backyard barrel burning" is the largest source of dioxin and furan emissions in the U.S. and a 2003 Environmental Canada report indicates that this practice is the largest remaining single source of environmentally occurring dioxins in Canada. The burn barrels of less than 40 households can release the same combined source of dioxins as a modern incinerator designed for servicing up to 120,000. Increased 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.

"Dioxin and furan pollution, especially when it is associated with burning plastic and other waste in backyard burn barrels, could be greatly reduced through the implementation of programs expanding the recycling and waste management services in rural areas of Ontario," continued Mitchell.

Mitchell went on to say that, "Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey and Vermont have banned the burning of household and farm trash like plastic baling twine and plastic containers, and a proposed ban is currently being considered in New York as well. I hope Ontario will follow this lead in the near future. This is an issue that deserves the attention of both Health Minister Smitherman and Environment Minister Dombrowsky. I urge them to act quickly to protect the health of Ontarians and our environment."