Backyard Trash Burning

Cooling the Flame with Safer Solutions

What is backyard trash burning?

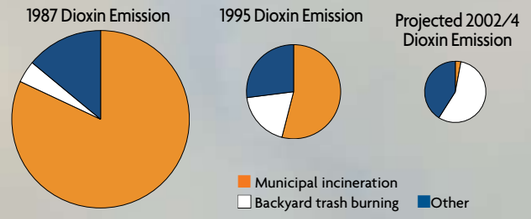
Backyard trash burning is a method used by many families to get rid of household waste and other trash, especially in rural areas where trash pick-up services are not provided or convenient. Most people who burn their trash use 55-gallon steel barrels or burn it directly on the ground. From food containers and boxes to household cleaners and cans, backyard trash burning is a quick way for many people to get rid of trash. But, backyard trash burning is bad news for our environment and our health. *And, open burning of household waste is illegal.* Read on to learn how you can implement alternative solutions to this risky practice.

Backyard trash burning: a risky practice

Backyard trash burning is bad news for our environment because it releases many fine particles (particulate matter) such as dioxins that pollute the air. Also, harmful pollutants released during backyard trash burning contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, which often looks like smog. This ozone can be dangerous for humans, plants and animals and can become a big problem for our environment, especially on hot summer days.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) backyard trash burning has become the leading quantified source of dioxin emissions to our environment.

As incineration technology becomes more efficient and other dioxin sources decline, backyard trash burning has become an increasingly larger "slice of the pie."[1]



Uncontrolled burning such as backyard trash burning can cause fire to spread to wooded areas, lawns or even homes. And common household trash such as aerosol cans can explode when heated to high temperatures.

Safer solutions to backyard burning

Municipal incinerators are a safer alternative to backyard burning.

Communities without a controlled system of waste disposal are encouraged to work with their local government to adopt safer solutions and educate others about alternatives to trash burning. If waste disposal systems are not an option, "trash" backyard burning with the easy and safe disposal methods highlighted in this brochure.

[1] Charts for 1987 and 1995 are based on data from the "US EPA Inventory of Sources of Dioxin-like Compounds in the US, 1987 and 1995." The 2002/04 chart is based on EPA projection assuming full compliance with regulatory levels by this period.
Source: www.dioxinfacts.org

Solutions through Science
Building Louisiana's Economy through Science and Technology

DEQ Louisiana

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals

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"Trash" backyard burning with simple solutions

From composting and recycling to reducing, reusing and even "freecycling," communities can easily "trash" backyard burning with simple solutions that are healthier for us and safer for the environment.

Compost

Composting leaves, branches and other plant clippings is an easy way to create nutrient-rich mulch, and it can even become a great source of worms for fishing. Steps for composting are:

1. Find an appropriate location for the pile.
2. Set up a compost bin to keep your pile neat.
3. Build the pile by throwing only organic materials as they become available. You can reduce the volume of leaves by shredding them before composting.
4. Covering the pile is optional but it can help if you live in a very dry or wet climate.
5. Occasionally turn the pile (no more than once a week). This helps to decompose the materials.

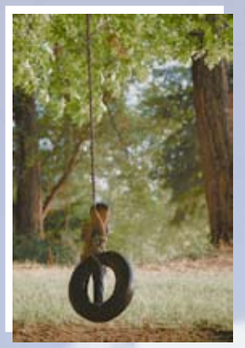
Reduce

From cookies and flour to washing detergent and cleaning items, household products are packaged in several sizes. Buying these items in bulk will reduce the amount of packaging, the amount of waste and even your trips to the grocery store.

Proper Disposal

Properly dispose of your trash by learning about your local waste-hauling service and options for disposal and special pickup services for bulk items. If you don't know your local waste hauler, call your local government to inquire about service.

Also, ask your local garbage service where to take hazardous materials such as motor oil and paint. Your local garbage service should offer such services or be able to inform you about options for disposing or recycling these materials.

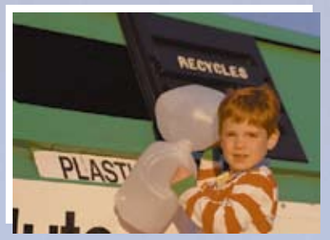


Reuse

Find alternative uses for containers that you might otherwise throw away. Save old furniture, toys, and clothes for an end-of-the-year garage sale or donate items that you no longer need or want to a charitable organization.

Freecycle

Freecycle, a new type of web site service that is popping up all over the country, offers an innovative alternative to trashing your trash. These new web sites help to find homes for items that might otherwise end up being thrown away. And, best of all, it's free! Visit www.redstickfree.org to learn more about freecycling in Louisiana.



Recycle

Did you know that nearly 30 percent of our garbage is being reused? Or, that a soda bottle can be recycled into a T-shirt, a milk jug can be recycled into lumber for playgrounds and that newspaper can be recycled into cereal cartons?

Recycling has become a very popular and simple way to get rid of trash. Most urban and some rural areas now have recycle pick-up programs for aluminum, glass, paper, steel, cardboard and plastic, or provide drop-off areas. Some areas even have recycling programs for old computers, tennis shoes and cell phones.

Contact your local waste center or local government for recycling options and a list of recyclable materials. Cleaning and separating recyclable materials will also ensure against messes and odors. To learn more about recycling in Louisiana visit www.louisiana.earth911.org.

Clearing the air for a safer future

Our air is improving thanks to the teamwork of government regulations, industry officials and environmental organizations. Learning about unregulated sources of pollution, like backyard trash burning, and adopting safer solutions to trash disposal brings us one step closer to "clearing" the air for a safer future.

To learn more about backyard trash burning alternatives, contact Solutions Through Science at 225-346-0303, bsmiley@stsla.org or visit www.stsla.org.