

# Learn before you burn!

## Some traditions should be broken

Autumn used to be a time when families got together to rake leaves from their yard, jump into the piles and roast marshmallows over the burning leaves. The smoky aroma told everyone it was time to pull out their sweaters and start a backyard football game.

But through studies, we have learned just how bad smoke can be for your health and the health of the environment. Many harmful chemicals are released in the smoke from fires year-round. The smoke from burning trash, tires, plastic and other manmade items is especially toxic. Even burning clean wood and yard waste, including leaves, yields smoke that can harm human health, the community's safety and the environment.

While Indiana regulations allow some types of residential open burning in most areas of the state, many communities have adopted local ordinances to ban or restrict residential open burning. It is time to protect our health and stop open burning. There are safe, simple alternatives for protecting your family's health, your property and air quality in your community.

## What goes up in smoke goes into your lungs

Breathing in smoke is never good for you.

To some, it may seem like a good idea to burn their trash rather than pay for trash pickup or disposal at a landfill. But it is illegal to burn trash. And anyone who burns trash, including household garbage, construction debris or waste tires, is creating a toxic situation.

Smoke from burning household trash, including plastic containers, is more toxic than the smoke from burning clean wood. Studies have found dioxins, arsenic, mercury, chromium, PCBs, lead and other dangerous chemicals in smoke from burning household trash. Serious health effects can be caused by harmful chemicals from burning items commonly found in household trash. Protecting your health is worth the small fee for proper waste disposal.

Even if your community allows residents to burn leaves or other yard waste, it is never advised. The smoke from any fire, including clean wood, can linger at ground level, where family members and neighbors can be affected. Only burn leaves or yard waste if you have no other alternatives. If you must burn, use a well-vented container (a burn barrel is not well-vented) and only burn clean wood. A properly vented container keeps the fire under control while allowing oxygen to feed the flames and reduce excessive smoke. A screen on top can prevent ash and other debris from drifting into the air. Never burn on windy days. Have plenty of water on hand. Stop burning if someone complains.

Thinking about  
**Open Burning**  
in Indiana?

**Think of something better.**



## A better way to get rid of waste

**Start a compost pile:** To safely get rid of clean yard waste, brush and leaves, start a compost pile in your backyard or use your community's composting program. Composting is like recycling for clean organic waste since it breaks down naturally over time. Maintaining a compost pile properly is a simple way to create rich, fertile soil for gardens and flower beds.

**Borrow or rent a wood chipper:** Chip branches and brush to create free wood chips and mulch for landscaping.

**Recycle household trash and appliances:** Take recyclable plastic, aluminum, tin, glass, paper and old appliances to your local recycler or community reuse center.

**Properly dispose of construction debris:** Except for clean wood scraps, construction debris should never be burned. Many construction materials release harmful chemicals when burned, such as asbestos, heavy metals and dioxins. Never burn asphalt shingles, gypsum board (drywall), painted, glued or treated wood, insulation or vinyl siding.



# Report open burning:

Call IDEM at (800) 451-6027  
to report illegal open burning.

Learn before you **burn!**

## If you must burn, proceed with care

What would camping be without a campfire or summertime without a family barbeque? Indiana allows burning of clean wood products and charcoal for the following types of fires.

- **Recreational or ceremonial fires** – These include campfires and bonfires; however, the size of the fire is limited.
- **Barbecues** – Barbecues using charcoal are allowed. Avoid using lighter fluid. Instead, using an electric lighter, charcoal chimney or newspaper as a lighting aid.
- **Maintenance burns** – Some agricultural burning is allowed for maintenance on farms, orchards, nurseries, cemeteries and tree farms.

Remember to use dry, clean wood and natural kindling to start your fires. Never use gasoline, or treated lumber. Have plenty of fire-fighting equipment nearby. Be sure to check with your local fire department or health department about local rules you must follow.



Indiana Department of  
Environmental Management  
Office of Air Quality  
(800) 451-6027  
[www.idem.IN.gov](http://www.idem.IN.gov)

## I have questions about...

Need more information about a topic? Visit the Web sites below to learn everything you need to know to avoid open burning.

**Recycling:** Visit the Recycle Indiana Web site to learn how to reduce your garbage and help protect natural resources through recycling. [www.recycle.IN.gov](http://www.recycle.IN.gov)

**Composting:** For more information about recycling leaves, plants and food scraps through composting, visit [www.recycle.IN.gov/topics/composting](http://www.recycle.IN.gov/topics/composting).

**Open burning:** Indiana's complete rules for open burning can be found at [www.idem.IN.gov/your\\_environment/air\\_quality/openburning](http://www.idem.IN.gov/your_environment/air_quality/openburning). Remember that all local ordinances also apply and need to be followed. Call your local fire department or department of health for information about local rules.

**Trash and construction debris:** Call your local solid waste management district to find out about trash pick-up and waste management options. For a list of solid waste management districts, visit [www.recycle.IN.gov/where/swmd](http://www.recycle.IN.gov/where/swmd).

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