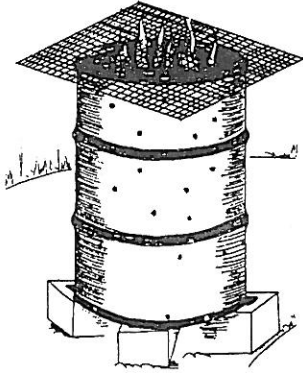

Burn Barrels: An Unhealthy Method of Garbage Disposal

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources



The Department of Natural Resources *strongly discourages* individual property owners from using burn barrels to dispose of household garbage, and *prohibits* commercial and government facilities from using burn barrels.

Garbage normally includes wet food scraps and plastic, which *are not* allowed to be open burned. Therefore, you may burn only the materials that are allowed to be open burned--namely, leaves, plant clippings, paper, cardboard and clean, untreated wood. Burn barrels operate at low temperatures (400-500 degrees F), resulting in incomplete combustion of the wastes being burned. Burning prohibited materials--such as plastics, asphalt, rubber and other man-made materials--generates additional hazardous air pollutants. A 1994 study done for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showed that each pound of garbage burned in a burn barrel emits twice as much furans, 20 times more dioxin and 40 times more particulates than if that same pound of garbage were burned in an incinerator with air pollution controls.

Burn barrels often emit acid vapors, carcinogenic tars, and "heavy metals" such as lead, cadmium and chromium, as well as unhealthful levels of carbon monoxide. The closer you stand to the burn barrel, the more of these harmful chemicals you inhale.

Residual ash is another result of incomplete combustion. Frequently, a significant portion of material in the barrel--especially at the bottom--is not burned up. Ash disposal outside of a sanitary landfill can cause problems sooner (for those immediately exposed) or later (for example, if

water contacting the ash becomes contaminated and gets into groundwater and/or surface water).

Materials that may not be burned in a burn barrel--such as tires, plastics and rubber--also should not be burned in a furnace, wood stove or similar home heating system.

What can individuals do instead of burning household and yard wastes?

Instead of burning, the DNR recommends that you:

- **Reduce** usage--buy in bulk or larger quantities and demand less packaging on the products you buy.
- **Reuse** items--find someone else who can use it, have a yard sale, or donate it to a resale organization.
- **Recycle** newspaper, office paper, cardboard, corrugated cardboard, magazines, aluminum, metal and acceptable plastics.
- **Compost** leaves and plant clippings. Consult DNR district or area staff, University of Wisconsin-Extension and your local government to find out whether local ordinances allow you to compost raw vegetables, bread, egg shells and coffee grounds.
- **Chip** brush and clean wood to make mulch or decorative chips, or use it as heating fuel in wood stoves or boilers.
- **Dispose** of allowable waste materials at a licensed landfill. For more information about what items may be disposed of at licensed landfills, contact the Recycling Program at your DNR district or area office.