

# Oconee County Code Enforcement

## Why Can't I burn my Trash?

As long as humans have generated trash, there have been barrels and piles of trash being burned. With today's growing populations and our knowledge of the chemistry and health effects from burning, we must stop this practice. Burning is particularly damaging to young children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems.

## Why People Burn their Trash!

Backyard burning is common in many areas of the county. People burn trash for various reasons – either because it is easier than hauling it to the local landfill or to avoid paying for regular waste collection service. In the past, backyard burning may have been the only way that many rural citizens could get rid of their waste. Today, however, almost everyone can obtain reasonably priced waste collection or take their waste to a conveniently located drop-off center as alternatives to backyard burning. Georgia and many local governments prohibit all backyard burning of waste with the exception of some vegetative wastes. Even with the laws in place, however, many people continue to burn.

## It is a Health Hazard

Most people who burn their waste do not realize how harmful this practice is to their health and to the environment. Current research indicates that backyard burning is far more harmful to our health than previously thought. It can increase the risk of heart disease; aggravate respiratory ailments such as asthma and emphysema, and cause rashes, nausea, or headaches. Backyard burning also produces harmful quantities of dioxins, a group of highly toxic chemicals that settle on crops and in our waterways where they eventually wind up in our food and affect our health.

## Burn Barrel Science

Typically, dioxins do not exist in materials before they are incinerated, but are produced when waste is burned. Significantly high levels of dioxins are created by burning trash in burn barrels. Household burn barrels receive limited oxygen, and thus burn at fairly low temperatures, producing not only dioxins, but also a great deal of smoke and other pollutants. Backyard burning is also particularly dangerous because it releases pollutants at ground level where they are more readily inhaled or incorporated into the food chain.

*Young children, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of backyard burning.*

Other Damaging Emissions:

- Carbon Monoxide
- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)
- Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs)
- Particulate Matter (PM) – smoke and soot
- Ash
- Hexachlorobenzene (HCB)<sup>1</sup>