



SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT for QUALITY of LIFE



OPEN BURNING LIMITS

What is it?

Open burning regulations refer to limits on any outdoor fire or outdoor smoke-producing process from which the products of combustion are emitted directly into the open air. Open burning is typically conducted using burn barrels, screened pits, backyard incinerators, and just plain "piling up" of refuse, trash, yard trimmings or leaves. Open burning regulations can be a controversial topic. Those who favor burning feel that it is their right to burn their trash in their own backyard. Those opposed to burning cite health issues, including asthma and other respiratory problems, along with nuisance concerns, as reasons open burning should be regulated in a community. It is up to each jurisdiction to limit, minimize, and manage open burning through ordinances.

How long does this take to implement?

Because open burning regulation impacts everyone, it may take six months to a year to adopt an ordinance and implement the program.

Shared Impact and Benefits

- Limiting the amount of open burning will help improve air quality, as it lowers the amount of particle pollution and toxins released into the atmosphere.
- Open burning limits will also reduce ground-level ozone by reducing nitrogen oxides produced during the combustion process.
- It also improves water quality and wildlife ecology as fewer toxins return to the earth through acid rain.
- Open burning is a major contributor to regional haze, such as blankets the mountains and obscures the view. By limiting open burning, jurisdictions can have an impact on haze.
- Limitations on open burning also have a safety impact, because open burning can sometimes lead to structural and wilderness fires that destroy property and sometimes cause injury or death.



This Action Item can be implemented as a

- POLICY
- ORDINANCE
- PROGRAM

Costs

- Expenses include staff time for education and ordinance development, and marketing costs for informational programs.
- If open burning is prohibited, the jurisdiction will need to develop alternatives for disposition of waste, whether curb-side trash pickup policy that includes yard waste, or a compost bin program.

The Bottom Line

- Restrictions on open burning will benefit the entire community in terms of reducing health and fire hazards, and will contribute incrementally to cleaner air for the region.
- After initial implementation, these restrictions will make a difference with minimal ongoing expenditure.

Interested? Read on!



Who needs to be involved in implementation?

- Local governing board (to adopt the ordinance or policy)
- Manager, planning department, and the public works/solid waste department (to prepare the ordinance or policy, develop alternative means of waste disposal, and conduct educational programs)
- Paid or volunteer fire departments
- State and local forestry representatives
- Representatives of local businesses that generate or manage high volumes of combustible waste, such as builders, land clearing companies, sanitation contractors, etc.
- Concerned citizens groups: community groups, environmental forums, realtors associations, neighborhood associations, etc.

Action Steps

1. Read the **Basic Information** section below to become familiar with the hazards and detriments associated with open burning.
2. Review sample ordinances of other jurisdictions (see **Who's doing this?** section).
3. Review the North Carolina Division of Air Quality Open Burning rule (§D1900) that can be found at <http://www.daq.state.nc.us/enf/openburn/>. Note that the Division of Air Quality is proposing new language to this rule that would prohibit open burning in any ozone forecast area that has predicted a Code "Orange" status or above for that forecast period. The proposed rule language can be found at <http://daq.state.nc.us/rules/draft/>.
4. Review current local policies and ordinances associated with air quality and revise them appropriately to include rules and guidelines about open burning and alternative means of trash disposal. It may be desirable to involve the public and major waste disposers in these discussions, to help to ensure plan acceptance.
5. Develop programs to increase awareness of open burning regulations for the public. Insure that there is adequate outreach/publicity for at least three months prior to kick-off to allow citizens time to find alternate means of yard waste disposal.
6. Investigate the feasibility of implementing a yard-waste pickup program or composting program. This may not be possible for a single jurisdiction, but a waste-hauler may be interested in a multi-jurisdictional contract.
7. Implement the open burning policy/ordinance.

Resources

- Local volunteer or paid fire departments often have a keen interest in the safety impacts of open burning, and may take on public education and enforcement as a part of their duties. This eliminates the need to hire new staff.
- Since banning or restricting open burning may also mean implementing a yard waste pick-up/drop-off program in your area, review current curb-side trash pickup services and disposal costs in your community.



Who's doing this?

States, counties and cities, like Chester, SC, City of Lancaster, SC and Forsyth County, NC, have open burning regulations and ordinances. See South Carolina statewide regulations at <http://www.epa.gov/region4/air/sips/sc/reg62-2.htm>.

Sample ordinances can be found at:

- Forsyth County, NC - <http://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/EnvAffairs/burn/landclearing.htm>
- Kane County, IL - http://www.edfire.com/kane%20co%20burning%20ordinance_no.htm
- Faribault, MN - http://www.ci.faribault.mn.us/fire_code/burning.html

Any jurisdiction can implement an open burning policy or ordinance.

Basic Information

- Many harmful pollutants are produced and released into the air when trash and leaves are burned. Some of these chemicals are toxic to people, animals, and plants. Open burning has been linked to a host of health problems including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), asthma attacks and other respiratory ailments. Open burning releases at least seven known cancer-causing agents into the air, including one believed to be a major factor in lung cancer. Even the non-cancer-causing particles in smoke are considered health threats as they are very small and can penetrate deeply into the lungs.
- Some chemicals released by open burning react with nitrogen oxides in the air to produce ozone, especially during hot, sunny weather. Ozone is also a powerful oxidizing agent that causes bleaching and deterioration of many textiles and building materials. See the SEQL Enhanced Ozone Awareness document.
- The pollutants from open burning contribute to reduced visibility (haze) and can cause serious eye irritation.
- Sulfur dioxides released into the air by open burning eventually return to our land and waterways in acid rain. Acid rain causes fish kills and plant (including crop) and property damage.
- Outdoor burning often exposes surrounding property to fire hazards.
- Smoke and odor from outdoor burning can often be a nuisance to neighboring residents and infringe on their right to enjoy their property.
- In North Carolina, the basic message of the state open-burning rule is simple: Only leaves, branches and other plant growth can be burned – nothing else. That means no trash, lumber, tires or old newspapers. If local pickup is available, you cannot burn even leaves and branches. Do not burn:
 - ◆ Garbage, paper and cardboard
 - ◆ Tires and other rubber products
 - ◆ Building materials, including lumber and wood scraps
 - ◆ Wire, plastics and synthetic materials
 - ◆ Asphalt shingles and heavy oils
 - ◆ Paints, household and agricultural chemicals
- A similar regulation exists in South Carolina (Regulation 61-62.2). This regulation allows open burning of household trash originating from private residences, if services for the disposal of the trash is not available. In this case, the burning must take place at least 500 feet from any inhabited building.
- Learn more about backyard composting from:
 - ◆ The North Carolina Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance at: <http://www.p2pays.org/compost/main/guide.htm> You may also want to refer to the Composting Fact Sheet at: <http://www.p2pays.org/ref/15/14411.pdf>.
 - ◆ The South Carolina Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling at: <http://www.scdhec.net/recycle>
- Refer to the South Carolina Forest Law Handbook section on the Regulation of Fires on Certain Lands (DHEC REGULATION 61-62.2) - <http://www.state.sc.us/forest/reflaws.htm#reg>



FAQ's

Q: What should be done with household trash and garbage?

A: Recycle glass, plastics, aluminum, used motor oil, and other recyclable materials through your local pick-up service or at drop-off convenience centers. Take your non-recyclable trash to a licensed landfill.

Q: If I can't burn my leaves, how am I supposed to dispose of them?

A: Composting is one of the best and easiest alternatives. When properly composted, leaves, yard trimmings, and certain food scraps can be turned into natural soil additives for lawns and gardens, and potting soil for houseplants. Finished compost can improve soil texture, increase the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, suppress weed growth, decrease erosion, and reduce the need to apply commercial soil additives. If composting is not feasible, try shredding or mulching. Land filling at a licensed landfill is an acceptable alternative. Contact your waste hauler or local government for specifics on leaf pickup availability and pricing.

Find out what other areas are doing. See the FAQ page in *The Home Owners Guide to Open Burning* at the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control in Delaware <http://www.dnrec.state.de.us/DNREC2000/Divisions/AWM/OpenBurning.htm>

Tracking Progress

Let Centralina Council of Governments know when you've implemented this action by contacting Carol Lewis at 704-348-2730 or clewis@centralina.org so that we may document your progress.

Intersecting Interests



AIR AWARENESS

Burning trash and leaves releases many harmful chemicals into the air and has been linked to a host of health problems, particularly respiratory ailments.



CLEAN AIR POLICY

An effective Clean Air Policy should consider the broad range of air pollutant sources, including open burning.



ENHANCED OZONE AWARENESS

Reducing open burning will help decrease the amount of ground-level ozone.

For More Information

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency :

NC State Implementation Plan - <http://www.epa.gov/region4/air/sips/nc/2dchap19.htm>

SC State Implementation Plan - <http://www.epa.gov/region4/air/sips/sc/reg62-2.htm>

NCDENR - Division of Air Quality
1641 Mail Service Center - Raleigh, NC 27699-1641 - (919) 733-3340
<http://daq.state.nc.us/enf/openburn/>

South Carolina Forestry Commission On Outdoor Burning:
5500 Broad River Road, Columbia, SC 29212 - (803) 896-8800
<http://www.state.sc.us/forest/fireburn.htm>

South Carolina Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling, 2600 Bell St., Columbia, SC 29201
<http://www.scdhec.net/recycle>