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## NEWS RELEASE

### Health Risks of Backyard Burning

The scent of burning leaves may bring back fond memories of your childhood or time spent in the country. But, breathing smoke from a trash fire, or any other type of fire, is unhealthy.

“Smoke from any fire can affect a person’s health. Backyard trash fires are particularly dangerous because they smolder, creating larger amounts of harmful chemicals, and the smoke is released close to the ground where people can easily breathe it,” said the Otsego County Department of Health.

People exposed to smoke may experience burning eyes and nose, coughing, nausea, headaches or dizziness. Also, some people find the odors from burning trash disagreeable.

Backyard trash fires are a common way to dispose of garbage, especially in rural areas, but they are especially dangerous due to the toxic materials they produce. The smoke from backyard burning produces smoke which contains chemicals and particles that can trigger asthma attacks and can be dangerous for people with heart and lung problems. Repeated exposures to pollutants in burn barrel smoke may increase the risk of these and other chronic health problems.

People can also be exposed to chemicals from burning trash when the smoke and ash settle onto homegrown fruits and vegetables. If the ash is mixed into garden soil chemicals may be taken up by crops. Children may be exposed to chemicals in the ash when they play in dirt where ash has been scattered. Also, accidental fires can be caused by unattended trash fires.

The content of today’s trash is very different from what it was 30 years ago. Today we use a lot more plastic and other types of synthetic packaging materials. Harmful chemicals are released when burning trash contains polystyrene, such as foam cups, treated or painted wood, and bleached or colored papers.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and municipalities regulate the open burning of trash. The Otsego County Department of Health recommends that you check with your local officials about any laws that may affect you and your neighborhood. Also, ask about their recommended methods for waste disposal.

To protect against the hazards of trash burning:

- Avoid waste. Buy products that have the least amount of packaging.
- Choose items that can be re-used or those that are sold in refillable containers.
- Learn about your community’s recycling programs. Use these programs and urge others to do the same.
- Set up a compost pile to recycle yard waste and food scraps.

For more information about backyard burning and better ways to dispose of trash call the Otsego County Department of Health at 607-547-4230 or visit the State Department of Environmental Conservation’s web site at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) or the State Health Department’s web site at [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov).

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