

Environmental Quality

Open Burning in Illinois



Open burning is the combustion of any material in the open or in an open dump and can potentially have unwanted health effects. When burned, all garbage, including paper, releases toxic chemicals, such as benzene, styrene oxide, formaldehyde, dioxins, and furans. Inhalation of these chemicals can be harmful to your health. Long-term exposure to certain pollutants can harm the lungs, kidneys, nervous system, and liver. Even short-term exposure may worsen asthma and other respiratory conditions. As a result, finding a safer alternatives to open burning is encouraged.

Open burning is generally prohibited in Illinois unless there is a statutory exemption provided in the Environmental Protection Act (e.g., burning of landscape wastes upon the premises where it is produced) or unless there is an exemption provided for in the Illinois Pollution Control Board's (Board) Part 237 rules (e.g., agricultural wastes, household wastes, and landscape wastes). The Board and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency regulate open burning. Local authorities/governments may also regulate open burning in areas where they have jurisdiction. Local ordinances may be more restrictive and may have independent permitting requirements.

If you live in any town or within a mile of a town with a population of 1,000 or more, it is illegal to burn most types of waste. Exceptions include the burning of landscape waste, where such waste is A) generated on the premises or at sites provided and supervised by any unit of local government or B) burned for agricultural purposes (example: landscape waste burned at production nurseries). Habitat management burns and the burning of certain structures or other materials for the purpose of firefighting training may also be authorized by permit.

Local ordinances may limit the burning of landscape waste. A recent provision authorized by the General Assembly makes the burning of landscape waste by a person engaged in a tree removal business permissible under certain conditions. See, 415 ILCS 5/9(f)(P.A. 103-794, effective 1/1/2025).

If you do not live in a town or within a mile of a town with a population of 1,000 people or more, it is legal to burn under the exceptions noted above.

In addition, you may burn household (or domicile) waste that is generated on the property as a result of normal household activities; however, you cannot burn food, food scraps, or food packaging. Burning trash may be legal in these areas, but it is an unhealthy way to dispose of trash. Please take a safe and healthy approach to waste disposal. You may also conduct open burning of agricultural waste. The burning of domicile and agricultural wastes are subject to additional restrictions set forth in the Board regulations.

Open burning of commercial/trade waste by business, industry, and government institutions is illegal in the State of Illinois, with the exception of 1) landscape waste generated on the property where the waste originated; 2) clean wooden building debris, landscape waste and agricultural waste in a recognized disaster area; or 3) agricultural waste under conditions specified in Board regulations.

Waste that can never be burned: Food and associated packaging; and tires.

Are campfires and bonfires permitted? Yes, campfires and bonfires are allowed on private property and in public areas where specified.

When do I need a permit? Open burning permits must be obtained for Fire Fighter Training/Fire Extinguisher Training, landscape waste burned with the aid of an air curtain destructor, prairie and ecological landscape burns, disaster debris, or where other provisions under the board regulations allow. Visit epa.illinois.gov/topics/forms/air-forms/open-burning.html for more information.

Where do I go to find open burning permit applications? To obtain open burning permit information and applications, go to epa.illinois.gov/topics/forms/air-permits/open-burning.html. For other state environmental information, go to epa.illinois.gov.

Are there conditions that must be followed when burning pursuant to an open burning permit? Yes, “Standard Conditions for Open Burning” are found at: epa.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/epa/documents/epa-forms/air/permits/state/171-apc.pdf

Is there a fee for open burning permits?
No, open burning permits are free.

What alternatives do I have to burning?

- Contact a local waste hauler about disposal options. Rural areas have more options than they used to.
- Reduce extra packaging by buying in bulk. Avoid buying disposable items; buy durable, repairable items.
- Reuse by donating unwanted clothing, furniture, toys, and electronics to friends or charities. Give old magazines and books to hospitals or nursing homes. Repair rather than discard or replace.
- Recycle junk mail, magazines, newspapers, office paper, cardboard, aluminum, tin, metal, and acceptable plastics. Return plastic bags to stores that recycle them. Contact your local solid waste agency or recycling coordinator for more information or to see about increasing recycling opportunities in your area. More recycling information can be found at: epa.illinois.gov/topics/waste-management/materials-management/recycling.html.
- Compost food, lawn, and garden waste.
- Yard waste can be shredded and used as mulch to enrich the soil and retain moisture, benefitting gardens and landscaping.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency can also be contacted by calling (217) 782-3397 or emailing EPA.ContactUs@illinois.gov.

Authorship

Produced by University of Illinois Extension in collaboration with and with information from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Modified August 2025



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