



TOMPKINS COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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EMC Resolution 2-2004: Recommending that the Tompkins County Legislature amend the Sanitary Code to prohibit open burning of household solid waste

WHEREAS, even with the existence of an excellent solid waste management program, a substantial number of people in Tompkins County continue to burn their household garbage, are unaware of the risks of incinerating household garbage in a backyard burn barrel, and still think of backyard burning as an inexpensive and easy way to dispose of their family's garbage, and

WHEREAS, this age-old practice has become increasingly harmful, because today's trash, when burned, emits highly toxic smoke that may contain dioxin, benzene, formaldehyde, arsenic, and cyanide, and

WHEREAS, due to its low and inefficient combustion temperature, one backyard burn barrel produces quantities of dioxins and furans equivalent to that emitted from a municipal incinerator serving 100,000 people, and

WHEREAS, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency recently identified uncontrolled trash burning in so-called "burn barrels" as the major source of dioxin contamination, which has been linked to developmental delays in children, damage to the immune system and increased risk of cancer, and

WHEREAS, dioxins are potent human carcinogens, and endocrine disrupters, and exposure to these dioxin-containing burn-barrel emissions increase the risk of long-term health effects such as damage to the lungs, heart, and nervous system, and

WHEREAS, according to the EPA, dairy cows that graze on pastures where burn barrel pollution has fallen may produce milk with higher concentrations of dioxins and other contaminants, and

WHEREAS, people can be exposed to these chemicals through the consumption of fruits and vegetables grown near the trash-fire or in garden soil tilled with the ashes, and young children, more than adults, may be at greater risk of exposure to these contaminants because they play on the ground, and their still-developing bodies are more susceptible to these contaminants, and

WHEREAS, the smoke emitted from burn barrels diminishes the quality of life in Tompkins County, as this smoke is irritating to ones eyes and lungs, affects hanging laundry, and discourages other outdoor activities, and

WHEREAS, in 2002, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Risk Reduction Strategies Work Group identified the releases to the environment that pose the most risk to human health and the environment, and determined that backyard burning was one of only six highest risk activities, and the most easily remedied, and

WHEREAS, current New York State laws on open burning do not adequately protect residents in rural areas from indiscriminate burning of household waste, and

WHEREAS, eight states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont, and recently, in January of 2004, California and New Mexico), and 4 New York counties (Broome, Herkimer, Monroe, and Oneida) have already banned open burning of household solid waste, and

WHEREAS, the New York State Senate has been unable to pass similar legislation in each of the past ten years, although the state Assembly usually passes it unanimously, and

WHEREAS, in New York State, the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Health, the Office of the Attorney General, and the advocacy groups Environmental Advocates, Cancer Action, and the American Lung Association, among others, all support banning open burning of household waste, and

WHEREAS, by establishing a ban on open burning of household waste in Tompkins County, we can send an important message to the New York State Legislature, encouraging them to finally enact a state-wide ban, and

WHEREAS, it is clear that backyard burning constitutes a public health nuisance, and we recommend its prohibition should be enforced by the Tompkins County Health Department, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Tompkins County Environmental Management Council recommends that the Tompkins County Legislature pass local legislation prohibiting the open burning of household solid waste by amending the Tompkins County Sanitary Code to reflect this.

Date: October 13, 2004

Voting in Favor: 8

Voting Against: 3

Abstentions: 0