

Burning Plastic

Can burning plastic cause cancer? **YES**

Is it legal to burn plastic? **NO**

If you SMELL burning plastic, determine the location and either try to educate the person burning the plastic about the health and environmental consequences

OR

call 911 immediately. Please do not assume someone else has made the call. State clearly that it is plastic (or tires) being burned and the location. The dispatcher will send an officer or the fire chief to deal with the situation.

Excerpt from Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem 2002–2003 Biennial Progress Report

What are dioxins and furans?

Dioxins and furans are formed when certain organic materials burn slowly at high temperatures. In Canada, dioxins and furans are created by the fires in waste incinerators, iron ore sintering plants, steel manufacturing plants, and pulp and paper mills, to name a few of the industrial sources.

The two toxic and cancer-causing chemicals are also created when people burn their waste in burn barrels. Household garbage now includes plastic packaging, disposable items such as razors, treated wood and junk mail. When these items are burned, dioxins, furans, arsenic, barium, mercury, lead, formaldehyde, PCBs and particulate matter are just some of the toxic chemicals that are released.

Once released, the dioxins and furans can contaminate water, soil and plants. Toxins are then taken up into the food chain, accumulating in the fat of animals, which are ultimately eaten by humans.

In addition to increasing the risk of cancer, dioxins have also been linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and developmental problems in children. These toxins may also compromise the immune system and disrupt the endocrine system, which includes the hypothalamus, pituitary, thyroid, parathyroid, adrenal and reproductive glands.