

Don't Trash Our Air

A Joint Resolution Promoting Interstate Cooperation to Reduce Air Pollution from Open Burning of Solid Waste

October 2004

WHEREAS, the undersigned State Environmental Commissioners and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 1–New England and Region 2 Administrators acknowledge that open, uncontrolled burning of trash impairs air quality in the surrounding community and may release to the environment fine particles, dioxin-like compounds, heavy metals including lead, arsenic, chromium and mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants, and may degrade visibility by contributing to the formation of regional haze; and

WHEREAS,

- the nature and composition of household trash includes many plastic and electronic products that contribute to noxious and unhealthful air emissions from uncontrolled burning;
- the conditions under which uncontrolled trash-burning occurs (i.e., relatively low temperatures, low oxygen input, no pollution controls) result in higher pollution emissions, pound-for-pound, than those from well-controlled municipal waste incinerators, regardless of waste composition;
- open trash-burning is considered by EPA to be one of the major uncontrolled sources of dioxin-like compounds and other combustion-related toxic pollutants;
- exposure to smoke from open trash-burning may result in immediate and long-term health effects, including a burning sensation in the eyes and nose, coughing, nausea, headaches, dizziness, asthma attacks, increased risk of cancer, and aggravation of respiratory illnesses in the general population and, in particular, in people with heart and lung disease;
- current levels of dioxin-like compounds in the general population approach levels that may be associated with health effects, based on current scientific knowledge, thus the need to minimize exposures to these compounds;
- most states in the Northeast have imposed complete bans and restrictions on open burning of trash due to concern about odors, potential health effects, and risk of fires;
- some residents still continue to openly burn trash; and
- increased outreach and education are needed to encourage residents to safely manage household trash.

THEREFORE, the undersigned resolve to:

- work together to understand the magnitude of the problem and its potential impacts;
- collaborate toward educating the public about the risks associated with uncontrolled open burning of trash and the importance of using safer alternatives;
- support state and local authorities that enforce bans and issue permits restricting open trash-burning;
- support proper solid waste management options, including recycling, that are both convenient and cost-effective;
- strengthen state and local restrictions or broaden bans, where appropriate; and
- share state and local outreach and assistance projects to learn from those experiences.

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