



Dear parents,

Right now in school, your children are learning about air quality, asthma, and how open burning affects both.

Open burning = any open flame exposed to the environment, where pollutants produced from the fire are emitted directly into the surrounding air.

Open burning is a common practice in rural Wisconsin. It is inevitable that when driving through rural Wisconsin in the fall, you can smell the rich scent of burning leaves. Wisconsinites have burned garbage for generations. Thousands of households, mostly in rural areas, small towns and villages, still burn their trash and yard waste instead of recycling, composting or taking it to the landfill.

Over time, the composition of household waste has changed dramatically. In the past, trash primarily consisted of paper and wood and the average household produced less trash – mostly because there was less consumption, less packaging and more reusing. Today's refuse contains many kinds of coated paper, chemically treated material, plastic and synthetics, and potentially dangerous chemical compounds that require recycling or safe and careful disposal. Combined with yard waste, the burning of these household items can trigger health problems. Household waste tends to burn at a low temperature and with poor combustion. As a result open burning generates many different types of polluting chemicals and sooty particles. The resulting ash can contain high levels of lead and cadmium, which are especially dangerous to young children. Burning garbage creates air pollution containing toxic chemicals and particles that can take a toll on healthy lungs and lungs with respiratory illnesses such as asthma.

FACT: In Wisconsin it is illegal to burn household solid wastes including plastic, painted or treated wood, waste petroleum products and oily paper and rags, and rubber products like tires.

Today, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources estimates there are about 500,000 burn barrels in Wisconsin alone. Many households also periodically burn yard debris and wood in open piles. Together, this open burning makes a significant contribution to air quality problems even in rural Wisconsin. And did you know about one-third of all wildfires in Wisconsin can be attributed to private burning in barrels and piles. These preventable fires are costly, destructive and dangerous.

Your child is studying a science module called *Air Defenders: The Quest for Clean Air*TM. He or she is learning about the science of what happens to garbage when we burn it, the health and environmental consequences of burning waste, and how to analyze alternatives to open burning, such as composting, recycling, and landfilling.

Many people in Wisconsin and across the U.S. and Canada are increasingly aware of the dangers of open burning to health, air quality, land use and safety. You can learn about open burning in Wisconsin by going to the DNR's web page at: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/environment.html>, and click on the "Open Burning" button or the Wisconsin Environmental Health Association's web page at: www.weha.net, and look for the open burning link.

