

Don't Burn Vermont: Backyard Burning and More
By: Linda K. Schneider

In the New England spirit of hardiness, this event was well attended in spite of an early October snowstorm. Twenty concerned citizens filled the South Woodstock Fire Station on Wednesday morning, Oct 26th, to learn more about air quality issues. Topics included: farm recycling of agricultural plastics, backyard burning rules, current and proposed regulations about outdoor wood boilers. This event was sponsored by your local Conservation District.

Annie Macmillan from Montpelier office of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture presented the topic; farm recycling of agricultural plastics. What should you do with the shrink wrap on large round hay bales and the pesticide containers? The simple answer is RECYCLE, but it gets considerably more complicated than that. Macmillan said, "Recycling is complex, due to the small population size of Vermont and the fact that our population is spread out all over the state. Combine that with the fact that our largest source of bale wrap is wet and dirty. This makes recycling options that much tougher." No one seems to be taking responsibility for cleaning the bale wrap, farmers or recyclers alike.

Macmillan gave a good example of how to recycle agricultural plastics, taken from our northern neighbors in Prince Edward Island. Macmillan said, "PEI has spotlessly clean farms. Canadian farmers clean and recycle agricultural plastic. We could learn from our neighbors."

It was also mentioned, that in New Jersey, the boating industry shrink wraps boats to winterize them from the salt air which can damage the fiberglass and wood on the boats. The New Jersey boaters gather the clean shrink wrap film and recycle it into park benches. This shrink wrap film is the same used on the Vermont farms, called agricultural plastic.

China is the recipient of used American agricultural plastic. The Chinese cut the large sheets down to use as garbage bags. Ultimately these smaller pieces end up in Chinese dump sites. Macmillan said, "Is giving our problem to the Chinese a real answer? Now we are making this a world problem, not finding a solution."

As I sat in the audience and listened, I wondered why our society hasn't dealt with this problem on a grander scale. Couldn't legislature create an industry wide responsibility act? If a company creates a product, that same company should be responsible for its ultimate recycled product. Maybe I am dreaming of a perfect world.

For more information about agricultural plastics, call Annie Macmillan 802-828-3479
OR go to: <http://www.vermontagriculture.com/Agplastics.htm>

Phillip Etter from Waterbury VT was the man with the longest job title in the room. Etter is from the Air Pollution Control Division of the state Department of Environmental

Conservation in the Agency of Natural Resources. Two topics were covered: 1. Backyard burning; what to burn, what NOT to burn, 2. Outdoor wood boilers, current and proposed regulations.

Etter said, "The state of Vermont still allows certain kinds of open burning if they don't create a nuisance to your neighbors and if they are not prohibited by local ordinances."

These types of fires are *allowed*:

- Campfires and outdoor barbecues

- Burning of leaves, brush, deadwood, tree cuttings, and weeds from your property

- Wood bonfires on festive occasions

However, *in Vermont it is illegal to burn*:

- Paper and cardboard

- Tires and other rubber products

- Treated, painted, or finished wood

- Plastics

- Garbage

Many towns require permits to burn. Check with local officials if you have any questions.

To burn large quantities of materials, you might need a permit from the Air Pollution Control Division of the state Department of Environmental Conservation. 802-241-3840

The last topic of outdoor wood boilers (OWB) was the most controversial topic of the day. They are called boilers instead of furnaces because they heat water. Etter said, "To help protect the air quality of Vermont for the health of all citizens, the new regulations for outdoor wood boilers are stricter than the current regulations. The current OWB units are inefficient and allow fine particles into the air. These units are not to be used as incinerators for burning trash."

When the price of oil spiked, so did the popularity of outdoor wood boilers. Alternative energy sources, such as wood, help to break the dependency on foreign oil. Wood is plentiful in Vermont, a renewable resource, and relatively inexpensive when compared to foreign oil. For centuries, wood has been a popular heat in Vermont because it burns hot and dry for our cold, wet winters. Fire Chief Fred Barr of South Woodstock said, "My family has heated with wood all my life, with a propane backup for the summer."

Barr said, "When I bought my OWB unit, the distributor insisted that I be a responsible wood burner and use this system right. It's important not to just throw anything in like trash and newspaper. Stop and think of your neighbor. Keep our air clean."

The attendees had questions, comments, and business concerns about the new proposed regulations. The discussion remained civil yet heated. (I couldn't resist.) Marvin Cole of South Pomfret commented, "I've owned by boiler for 15 years and haven't had to burn a drop of oil."

The controversial proposed regulations may hamper the sales of OWBs in Vermont; until the makers and developers of these units get new models released that meet this new standard. Etter said, "The developers have been asked for years to increase the efficiency of these units to burn cleaner, they have new units in research and development. The technology is out there. We do not want to compromise our air quality."

Cobb Hill Farm in Hartland, heats with a Garn central heating unit which is designed differently than the single home units. Small scale system applications include schools, factories, hospitals, community centers and government buildings. Using wood biomass for heat is almost a given in some sectors; such as industry. "Wood Fueled Boiler Financial Feasibility" is a new Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program. It provides information on annual savings and potential payback of wood fuel. For more information contact Professor Robert Govett of University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources at: rgovett@uwsp.edu.

In conclusion, we all share the same air, maybe not the same opinions about outdoor wood boilers. It is the Department of Environmental Conservation's job to protect air quality for all Vermont citizens. Department of Environmental Conservation is a regulatory agency; a legislative vote will not be needed. The new proposed regulations are scheduled to go into effect Jan 1, 2006. To find out more details about the regulations go to: www.anr.state.vt.us/air

www.dontburnvermont.org

Or call Phillip Etter at 802-241-3847

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