

Open Burning Vs. Pollution

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Open burning of any kind is now prohibited in New York State. The state has passed an Anti Air Pollution ordinance which is being enforced.

At present, Municipalities are generally allowed to open burn on their respective dumps on a daily basis. However, they must cover the burned refuse with earth each day. This is a costly method of solid waste disposal. I can see it for garbage and general refuse, but not for leaves, wood, or brush.

Government constantly seeks to improve the living conditions of everyone. In my present position as Majority Leader of the Dutchess County Board of Representatives, and in past public positions, I, along with my colleagues who also serve, recognize this fact. But we are also aware that there has to be a point where simple economics must be reckoned with. Our goal is to eliminate air pollution insofar as possible. At the same time we cannot agree to a major expenditure of money and effort which does very little to create clean air.

As an operator of a tree service business, I face rising costs. These costs must be passed on to the customer. Removing wood and brush other than by burning when working in rural areas and along utility rights-of-way is very costly. It means that we must charge the utility companies more for the work. They in turn must pass this extra cost on to customers. Customers continue to pay more and more for the goods and services they buy.

Elm trees along highways and on private property are a major concern at this time. Eliminating burning in New York State has both raised the handling cost of these, and has contributed to the spread of Dutch elm disease. Wood which was formerly burned is now left along rights-of-way or relegated to a Town dump where it becomes a prime breeding place for the carrier of this disease, the elm bark beetle.

Accumulations of leaves on home lawns presents a removal cost. It is fine to suggest that they be used for compost heaps, but few town residents know how to handle these. Nor do they need them. If the Town removes leaves, operation costs of Town maintenance increase. This extra expense must be met by new taxes. For myself, I personally mourn the passing of

the pungent odor of burning leaves. To me, it was one of the pleasant experiences of our crisp fall season. It has been replaced by the soggy leaf problem. Many citizens who cannot or will not bear the expense of removal let them accumulate in gutters or in unsightly piles.

State highway jobs which are let for bid, now have an added cost factor. Rather than burning brush on cleared land, it is now necessary to load such material onto trucks for removal. Brush refuse has to be trucked to some dumping area or ravine and covered. Result is higher costs of highway construction which are passed on to the taxpayer.

At the same time that such added costs are being passed on to the taxpayer, legislators who passed the Anti Air Pollution ordinance are telling constituents back home that they are taking "a long, hard look" at the problem of rising costs. In my opinion, unless we graduate from the "long, hard look" to the "short, sensible action" we will have further increased costs.

In summary, I believe that the idea behind the anti pollution program is commendable, both in New York State and across the nation. If we don't take steps to purify the air we breathe, we may suffer lung ailments and other types of associated illnesses. But since motor vehicles and industrial stack wastes contribute many of the known pollutants, and certainly the most toxic materials, I feel that there is much to be done before we worry about wood, brush, and leaf burning.

My opinion is that burning of wood, brush, and leaves in a sensible manner should be permitted. By the time wood smoke is dissipated into the air, its pollutant effect is only a tiny fraction of the total air pollution problem. Its toxic effect on the lungs of the citizenry is infinitesimal when compared to the smoke inhaled into the lungs by cigarette smoking.

(Editors note: Mr. Bartles formerly served as Supervisor of the Town of Hyde Park, N. Y., and is presently serving as Majority Leader of the Dutchess County Board of Representatives. This board has recently passed a resolution asking the state to rescind that section of the ordinance which prohibits burning of leaves, wood, and brush. WEEDS TREES AND TURF carries this editorial because of the industry's need to remain alert to this type of restrictive legislation.)