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Air

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Who to ask: village residents

98. Yes No ?

Can smoke from the burning garbage at the landfill be smelled in the village?

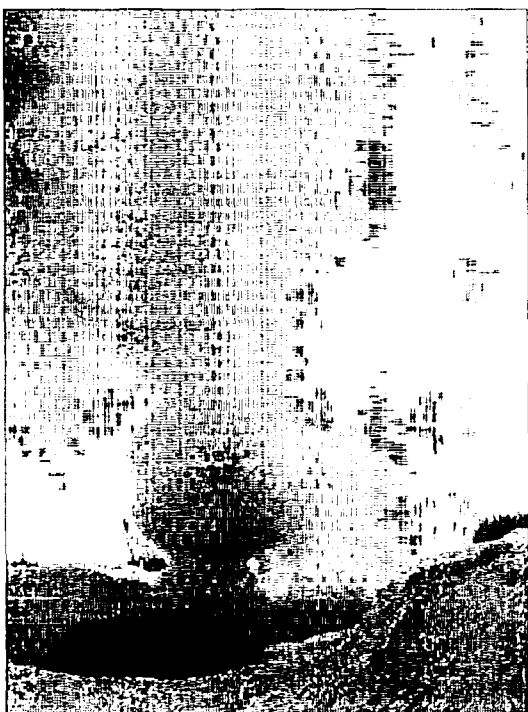
Smoke from burning garbage at the landfill is unhealthy to breathe. Inhaling smoke from burning garbage can have many different health effects on individuals:

- *Short-term effects include: wheezing, watery eyes, "cold" symptoms, pneumonia, and bronchitis.*
- *Long-term effects include: allergies, sinus infections, asthma, emphysema, heart disease and cancer.*

Children are at greater risk for getting sick from inhaling smoke because their lungs are still forming and they take in 50% more air per body weight than adults do. Respiratory problems are the leading cause of chronic illness in children today. Other individuals who are at greater risk from smoke pollution include the elders and people with asthma and heart or respiratory disease.

Before a large amount of garbage is burned at the landfill, a test burn should be done to see where the smoke will go. It should go straight up for about 200 feet and be transported away from the village and residences in order to prevent the smoke from being inhaled by people in the village. If the smoke goes toward the village school or houses, you should wait until the weather changes and there is a better time to burn.

Alternatives to the open burning of garbage include recycling, composting, burying, and incineration.



Smoke from burning garbage at the landfill is unhealthy to breathe.

Photo courtesy Bill Stokes.

99. Yes No ?

Do village residents use burn barrels?

A burn barrel is usually a 55-gallon steel drum that individuals or families use to burn garbage. Burn barrels are one way to reduce the amount of paper/wood products that end up in the landfill. Although burn barrels are convenient and reduce the amount of times that you need to go to the dump, they are harmful if used improperly.



Illustration by Natalie Garber

Hazardous wastes and plastics should be removed from other wastes placed in a burn barrel. The smoke produced from burning plastic is dangerous to breath. When plastic is burned at home in a burn barrel, you are exposing your family and the rest of the village to toxic substances. Hazardous wastes that are not separated from other garbage may cause a dangerous explosion in the burn barrel and produce toxic fumes as well.

A burn barrel can be built so that it burns hotter and produces less smoke. This type of barrel will more effectively burn garbage and be safer to use.

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100. Yes No ?

Is burning plastic the main odor smelled when garbage is burned?

Plastic becomes very toxic when burned and can be harmful to both your body and to the environment. Plastic items should be separated from other garbage that is going to be burned. Reducing the amount of plastic used can help prevent plastic from getting into the waste stream in the first place.

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101. Yes No ?

Do village residents consider cigarette smoke and wood stove smoke as sources of indoor air pollution?

Cigarette smoke and wood stove smoke are serious sources of indoor air pollution. Cigarette smoke, in particular, is one of the most widespread and harmful indoor air pollutants. The smoke is a mixture of irritating gases and cancer-causing tar particles. It is a known cause of lung cancer and respiratory illness, and has been linked to heart disease. In Alaska, tobacco related lung cancer is the fastest growing form of cancer among the Native population. Children can also become very sick by inhaling the smoke of others.



Find out the answer to this question by asking a number of people in your community if they think cigarette smoke and wood stove smoke are sources of indoor air pollution. If responses show that most people do not consider these as sources of pollution, this will indicate that educational programs are necessary on these issues.

102. Yes No ?

Do village residents use wood stoves to heat their homes?

If yes, how many houses?

The smoke produced by wood stoves is a source of indoor air pollution. Smoke from wood stoves is particularly a problem in rural Alaska where many homes have been "weatherized" (highly insulated) and there is little circulation of air. Residents who rely on wood stoves as a source of heat in their homes are at risk for many of the respiratory problems related to inhaling smoke and carbon monoxide. Using only dry wood and not allowing the fire to smolder will reduce the amount of smoke produced and be less of a health hazard. Also, plastics should not be burned in wood stoves. The fumes from burning plastic are poisonous to breath.

For a more thorough self-assessment of indoor air quality issues, you can contact the tribal indoor air quality project called "Our Sacred Breath."

For more information on this program, contact Nancy Rae at (360) 598-3311 ext. 218, or fax (360) 598-6295, or email nancyrae <dnr@suquamish.nsn.us >