



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

*We Protect Hoosiers and Our Environment.*

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Indiana Department of Environmental Management E-News Release

For immediate release  
September 15, 2008

### **Proper leaf disposal benefits everyone**

By Commissioner Thomas Easterly, Indiana Department of Environmental Management

Along with children returning to school, autumn brings with it the bounty of summer's harvest, crisp evening air and the changing color of fall foliage. While nature's beauty provides a glorious visual display, what Hoosiers do with fallen leaves can affect the environment.

Historically, many Hoosiers have been quick to reach for their matches to rid their yards of fallen leaves and other yard wastes, such as grass clippings, branches and weeds. While burning gets rid of the wastes, the smoke from these fires affects air quality, so setting fire to yard debris is not advised. Smoke from all fires releases carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, fine particles and ozone-forming chemicals and can cause a number of negative impacts for Hoosiers and our environment. Unlike dry, seasoned fire wood, fallen leaves have high moisture content and tend to smolder, releasing thick, unhealthy smoke that can affect family members, neighbors and our environment.

Why should we be concerned about finding alternatives to open burning leaves and other yard waste? Anyone can be affected from the unhealthy smoke from burning piles of leaves. Elderly, young children and individuals with respiratory or heart ailments are particularly vulnerable to ill health effects from fine particle emissions. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) revised the threshold for both particulate matter and ozone, holding all communities accountable for ensuring concentrations lower than ever before. As a result, all of us should work together to prevent unhealthy emissions from unnecessary open burning of leaves and other yard waste.

The good news is there are simple things every one of us can do to improve air quality, starting with the disposal of yard debris. The best way to get rid of leaves, branches and other yard wastes is by composting, chipping and mulching. These options can be done in your own yard or through a program set up with your city, township or county. Composting returns nutrients to the soil instead of releasing harmful chemicals into the air. Chipped wood can be used around trees and in flower beds to retain soil moisture and control weeds. Mulching leaves on the lawn with a lawn mower returns nutrients to the grass, fertilizing your yard. Raking leaves into a pile and composting them over the winter creates a fertile soil amendment that can be used for flower beds, gardens and potted plants in the spring. Food scraps can be added to an active compost pile year-round to reduce the amount of kitchen waste being sent to landfills.

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Since burning leaves, twigs and other yard waste is bad for the environment, I strongly recommend considering alternative ways of ridding your yard of waste. Smoke is unhealthy to breathe, it's a hazard, and there are safer, cleaner and more environmentally-friendly ways of disposal. To learn more about ways to dispose of yard debris, visit IDEM's Web site at <http://www.IN.gov/idem/4525.htm>.



IDEM Commissioner Thomas Easterly

**About IDEM**

IDEM (<http://www.idem.IN.gov>) implements federal and state regulations regarding the environment. Through compliance assistance, incentive programs and educational outreach, the agency encourages and aids business and citizens in protecting Hoosiers and our environment.

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