

Disposing of Old Burn Barrels - A HOT Topic at GLRA

During the past year there have been three fires at the GLRA. Two were isolated at the Convenience Center and extinguished by staff. One was on the landfill and required local Fire Departments to respond. All three are believed to have been caused by hot ashes, coals, or embers contained in *burn barrels* which were deposited into the roll-off containers at the GLRA's Convenience Center by unsuspecting customers.

Over the years there have been fires on the landfill caused by chemicals contained in waste, by agricultural lime which reacted with liquid in the landfill, and by a collection of *empty* cigarette lighters which erupted into a fireball when crushed by the landfill equipment. The source of each of these fires was identified and, in cooperation with the persons generating the waste, eliminated. Only one of the three fires originating from ashes from burn barrels has been isolated to the customer.

Ashes from burn barrels continue to be a hazard to the GLRA facilities, employees and customers because the container may be cool to the touch but hot material is still contained deep within insulating layers of ash. When the container is dumped, the ash is disturbed and any hot embers are exposed to air and other trash, a fire sometimes results. The potential damage to facilities from the fires which result is huge - cost of the empty landfill is about one half million dollars per acre. There is also a serious risk to employees, customers, fire department personnel and the environment when the fire is active.

It is important to note that burn barrels that have been *out* for fourteen (14) days may still contain hot embers which can cause fires.

Beginning in 2007, fires on the landfill will also result in shutting down gas collection systems and the power generators until the fire is extinguished and confirmed out.

Actions taken to stop fires from burn barrels include posting signs prohibiting hot ashes and having employees ask customers whether there are any hot coals or materials in their burn barrels. To comply with the requirement for no hot ashes or coals, the contents of a burn barrel should be stirred thoroughly then examined. This does not happen. The customer touches the sides of the container and, if it doesn't burn their hand, believes there is nothing hot inside. When the ashes are dumped at the landfill there are still fires.

Actions which GLRA staff believes will work are to stop accepting burn barrels entirely or to require that ashes be removed from the burn barrel and placed into plastic garbage bags. The bags of ash and the empty barrel would then be accepted for disposal at the landfill. The hope is that any hot ashes present would be detected during the process of transferring material from the burn barrel to the plastic bags, especially when the bags melt and the ashes fall onto the ground. The hot ashes would be noticed at that point rather than resulting in a fire at the landfill.

Several municipalities in GLRA's service area still permit open burning of household waste. Although GLRA accepts that burning of household waste is a popular activity in these municipalities, watch for changes in the GLRA regulations concerning the disposal of burn barrels and ashes at GLRA's facility which are necessary to stop fires at the landfill.

