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Open burning of household flood debris in Louisiana is harmful and illegal

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality reminds residents affected by the recent flood that burning household debris is harmful to themselves, their families, and their neighbors and is also against the law.

“In Louisiana, it is illegal to burn solid waste and any household waste, such as construction and demolition debris, household chemicals and oil, regardless of whether it’s on private property or not,” LDEQ Surveillance Division Administrator Mike Algero said. “Those materials should be separated by type and set out curbside for proper removal to a permitted landfill by the local waste management contractor.”

When burned, household debris such as carpets, foam insulation, PVC pipe, asphalt shingles, linoleum and most other synthetic materials release toxic pollutants which include hydrogen chloride, hydrogen cyanide, phosgene, sulfur dioxide, dioxin, carbon monoxide, heavy metals and other toxic chemicals. These pollutants can cause health problems for anyone living or working nearby. Health effects include damage to lungs, the nervous system, kidneys and liver – with some pollutants causing asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and cancer.

In addition, the ash generated from an open burn contains toxic substances that threaten the air and can become a threat to ground water. Construction and demolition waste should be disposed of at permitted landfills, municipal incinerators or other state-approved facilities where environmental and health risks are minimized.

LDEQ encourages citizens to watch for open burning activity and to protect yourself as well as your family and your neighbors by reporting any open burning activity to local law enforcement as well as LDEQ.

If you witness an open burn of waste tires, household debris, oil or chemical waste, please contact your local law enforcement authorities as well as LDEQ at: 1-888-763-5424. Citizens should also submit an incident report online at: <http://www.deq.louisiana.gov/apps/forms/irf/forms/>. Reports can be made anonymously, but a phone number is required for a call back if further details are needed.

Be sure to document the exact location, time/date, materials being burned, parties involved and any other details in order to better assist authorities with an investigation.

Local law enforcement officials are watching for this activity and are continually working in conjunction with LDEQ on investigations of open burn activity. If anyone is found to be conducting an open burn, LDEQ’s Criminal Investigations Section will investigate and aggressively prosecute anyone found to be in violation of the law.

If charged with illegally open burning household debris, violators may face a fine of up to \$100,000, ten years imprisonment at hard labor, or both if the action is determined to endanger or could endanger human life or health.