



City of Big Lake Environmental Education Newsletter

May

Happy Spring! The sun is finally shining, the snow is finally gone, and the plants are starting to reappear after a long winter. With spring comes some new environmental concerns and serves as a good time for some reminders.

Spring Topics: Burning Yard Waste, Air Pollution, Turtle Safety

Spring Burning Restrictions

Warm temperatures and dry conditions mean increased wildfire risk, so the Minnesota DNR is restricting open burning in most MN counties, including Sherburne, effective immediately.

The state will not issue burning permits for brush or yard waste in these counties until this ban is lifted.

“For more than a decade, spring burning restrictions have successfully reduced the number of wildfires we’ve had in Minnesota,” said Casey McCoy, DNR fire prevention supervisor. “In fact, wildfires are down more than 30 percent from a decade ago, thanks in large part to these restrictions.” McCoy cautions that, to keep this trend going, people must continue to follow burn restrictions. He also encourages residents to use alternatives to burning, such as composting, chipping, or taking brush to a collection site. For information on Big Lake’s compost facility, visit the website: <https://www.biglakemn.org/167/Compost-Facility>.



Those who burn debris can be held financially responsible if their fire escapes and burns other property.

For information and daily updates on current fire risk and open burning restrictions, visit the Minnesota DNR website: www.mndnr.gov/burnrestrictions.

Air Pollution Concerns Grow With the Arrival of Spring

There are many small, but critical sources of air pollution in our homes and neighborhoods. Such sources — vehicles, construction equipment, lawn mowers, dry cleaners, backyard fires, and auto-body shops — are located where we live and work. Total emissions from these smaller but widespread sources are significantly greater than all the industrial sources in the state combined. Here’s how you can help:

1. **Drive your car less.** Vehicle exhaust is a major source of air pollution in Minnesota. Carpool. Bike. Bus. Utilize the NorthStar and TriCAP. Telecommute.
2. **Keep your car in good repair.** Fix exhaust and oxygen sensor problems ASAP. [Check tire pressure](#) monthly.
3. **Turn off your engine.** An [idling engine](#) creates a hot spot of pollution. Parents and teachers can help their schools and daycares develop and implement no-idling policies.
4. **Don't burn your garbage.** Burning your household garbage is dangerous to your health and our environment, and generally against the law in Minnesota. If you're still using a burn barrel, wood stove, or fire-pit for your trash, it's time for a change.
5. **Stop having campfires in cities.** Smoky areas resulting from campfires in cities can cause unhealthy conditions for hundreds of people, especially during stagnant weather conditions. Since cities have elevated levels of pollution compared to rural areas already, please limit the number of campfires you start in urban locations. If you do have a campfire:
 - o Keep campfires brief and small--3 feet across or less.
 - o Burn only dry fire wood. It is currently illegal to burn yard waste.
 - o Never start campfires during an [air quality alert](#). You can receive texts or emails when air pollution alerts are in effect.
6. **Plant and care for trees.** Trees filter pollutants and absorb carbon dioxide. Trees also release oxygen into the atmosphere and help cool our homes.
7. **Switch to electric or hand-powered lawn equipment.** Gas-powered engines like those on lawnmowers and leaf blowers often lack pollution control devices. An hour running a lawn mower can produce nearly the same amount of pollution as a 100-mile car trip! Use hand-powered or electric lawn care equipment instead.
8. **Use less energy:** Choose efficient appliances and heating systems. Get an energy audit and follow the advice. Turn off electrical stuff you are not using. It all adds up.
9. **Check your home for radon.** Radon is a colorless, odorless radioactive gas that seeps into your house from the soil. [Get more information about radon and home testing kits](#) from the Minnesota Department of Health.
10. **Become a champion for clean air.** Share your reasons for doing the things you do

[Protect the Blanding's Turtles](#)

Despite its threatened species status, the [Blanding's Turtle](#) is still fairly abundant in some areas of Minnesota, such as Big Lake. Blanding's Turtle populations face significant threats to long-term survival such as habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, road mortality, and potentially climate change. The species remains legally protected throughout all of Minnesota and technically may not be handled or possessed without a [special permit](#). However, in life or death situations we recommend moving Blanding's a few feet off the road to safety. Unfortunately, these rare turtles are sometimes illegally collected for personal pets. To ensure that your good intentions are clear to law enforcement officers, or other that may be watching, **do NOT bring the turtle into an automobile or place in a container, even temporarily, while helping the turtle out of harm's way.**

Be a Citizen Scientist: When possible, document your encounter for the threatened species with a couple photographs, be sure to note the date and your location to the best of your ability (use

nearest house address, cross-street, etc.). Please e-mail or call your regional [Nongame Wildlife Program](#) staff to report observations. Learn more about Minnesota's [turtle diversity](#).

- **Document Your Find.** Help us document turtle crossing and mortality areas by participating in the [Minnesota Turtle Crossing Tally & Count Project](#).

Giving Turtles a Hand

Helping turtles safely across roads, particularly females with eggs, is vital to the preservation of regional populations. The following important points should be remembered if this activity is to remain an effective turtle conservation tool.

- **Don't put yourself or others in danger.** Simply pulling off the road and turning on your hazard lights may alert other drivers to slow down. Be aware of your surroundings.
- **Avoid Excessive Handling.** While wanting to inspect turtles closely is understandable, excessive handling can disrupt normal behavior. Prolonged examination of turtles should therefore be limited to only one or two individuals of each species.
- **Allow Unassisted Road Crossings.** When turtles can safely cross roads unaided due to a lack of oncoming traffic allow them to do so. Observe from a distance and avoid rapid movements, as doing otherwise will often cause turtles to change direction, stop, or seek shelter within their shells.
- **Handle Turtles Gently.** If necessary to pick them up, all turtles except Snappers and Softshells should be grasped gently along the shell edge near the mid-point of the body. Please be advised that many turtles empty their bladder when lifted off the ground, so be careful not to drop them if they should suddenly expel water.
- **Maintain Direction of Travel.** Always move turtles in the same direction they were traveling in when encountered. Turtles should always be moved across roadways in as direct a line as possible. It may seem helpful to "assist" the turtle in its journey by moving them to a nearby waterbody, but it is important to remember the phrase, "**If you care, leave it there.**"