

Fires not the only irritant

<http://www.kitchenerpost.ca/opinion/fires-not-the-only-irritant/>

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Re: [Campfire blues](#); June 29

I have experience on both sides of the outdoor fires issue. There's nothing I love better than sitting around a fire after dark, alone or with friends, listening to nature sounds, to conversations or to home-made music. But there is nothing worse than a prevailing wind pattern that drives smoke straight from an urban pit into your bedroom window.

Sore eyes and throats are the least of it. My airways would choke up the way firefighters go to extreme lengths to prevent.

Sometimes it would take days for the headaches to go away, and my place would smell like a forest fire had been through. When fires happened on repeated hot nights, it got harder and harder to drag myself to work, as exhaustion and health challenges took a toll on both energy and brain-power.

Rather than licensing or banning urban fires, I'd like to propose a "plume" bylaw, applying to all air pollutants (irritant and toxic smoke from fires, neurotoxic fabric-softener and laundry-detergent fumes from dryer vents, cigarettes in doorways or at outdoor events, etc.). The plume bylaw would look at prevailing wind conditions on site, and if it could be shown that other people's air quality was being adversely affected, the "site" would have to change in order to remove this impact, or face fines.

For example, smokers at an outdoor concert such as the Kitchener Canada Day celebrations would have a designated area on the downwind side of the enclosed area, so that their smoking wouldn't impinge on non-smokers' enjoyment of the event (the wet finger test makes this easy). In the case of backyard fires, the fire might need to be located in another part of the yard, or a chimney created to lift the smoke into an airstream above neighbours window heights (a la Sudbury's stack).

Unlike fires and cigarettes, there's no good excuse for toxic laundry product venting, as neurotoxic laundry scent is neither a key human pleasure, nor an addictive government money-maker. Any useful solution other than outright banning toxic laundry detergents and fabric softeners within city limits would involve requiring a tall stack to vent from any household using toxic products, similar to the bathroom plumbing vent out the roof.

While the songbirds wouldn't thank us for raising the laundry product plume off street level, children and seniors on the sidewalks who are at worst risk from these brain-damaging compounds would at least have some protection.

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