

A burning issue or a drop in the bucket?

When the issue is leaf burning, it's both.

The problem with leaf burning is that although the fire may be confined to an individual's property, the smoke cannot be. The recent ruling—to allow burning only in areas more than one mile from some urban areas in Winnebago County—works only if the smoke can somehow be restricted to a certain area. Of course, it can't, which is why the ruling is little better than allowing open burning in all unincorporated areas.

Anything in the air that irritates the lungs is a danger for people with asthma. Even though the pollution from burning leaves may seem like just a little thing, a little thing in the air can cause big problems in the lungs.

Imagine a bucket of water that is full to the brim. In fact, it's so full that it's **almost** overflowing, but not quite:



If you were to add just one drop of water to this bucket, it would overflow. The important thing is that it wouldn't overflow by just one drop; a lot more than just that one drop would spill.

Asthma symptoms can be compared to this imaginary bucket full of water. Suppose your lungs have already been exposed to a lot of things that irritate them (things that irritate your lungs are called "triggers"), and your lungs are on the brink of showing symptoms; your "symptom bucket" is brim-full, and just one more little thing will make it overflow. In other words, one more trigger that your lungs have to deal with will make your lungs react to everything they're dealing with--not just the one thing that was too much.

To put it another way, let's say your triggers include cats, dust, and leaf smoke. If you are exposed to just one of them, you might not have noticeable symptoms, or your symptoms might be minor. If, however, you are exposed to cats and dust and then are

exposed to smoke, you would react noticeably to all three triggers, not just the final one (the smoke). If you hadn't been exposed to that smoke, you might not have had noticeable symptoms at all.

No one really knows when and how much they will react to a trigger. If you haven't been exposed to many triggers recently and are exposed to one, you might have symptoms or you might not; there's no good way to know how full your "trigger bucket" (also called "trigger load") is. Another way to phrase this is that everyone's "tolerance" for triggers is different; the same person's tolerance will be different on different days and at different times, and there is no good way to measure that tolerance.

Medication does help reduce the severity of symptoms, and may even help you react less frequently than you do without medication; however, the best way to avoid having symptoms, and to keep up your normal life, is to avoid triggers whenever possible. Since it's not possible to avoid smoke when someone is burning leaves, that's just one more trigger that people who have asthma will be exposed to and one more trigger that may cause symptoms in people.

A lot of the discussion about leaf burning concerned the lack of low-priced alternatives to burning. The statement was made that there were no "reasonable" alternatives to burning. **However, there are no alternatives to breathing, at any price.**

For information on how to contact your representative on the Winnebago County Board, go to

<http://www.comportone.com/getparent.html?cpo/govment/il-counties/winnebago/winnebago.htm,cpo/navi1.htm>