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Burn barrel opponents bike for ban

*By Tom Grace
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Burn barrel opponents are going to ride bicycles to Albany over the next few days, trying to convince state legislators to enact a statewide ban on backyard burning.

"I've been at this for 15 years, and I think we're getting close to some action," said Martha Clarvoe of Hartwick.

Clarvoe, a member of Otsego County's Burn Barrel Education Committee and a former president of the League of Women Voters of the Cooperstown Area, will make the trip.

"We're going to try to ride 50 miles a day," she said. "I'm going to ride part of the way when the 'Tour de Burn Barrel' comes near our area. Then on Monday, I'll drive to Albany and join the riders as they enter the city."

The bicyclists will converge on the state's Legislative Office Building and meet with staff members of state Sen. Carl Marcellino, R-Syosset, who chairs the committee that oversees the Department of Environmental Conservation, she said.

"He seems knowledgeable about burn barrels, but he doesn't think many people care about what this is doing to the environment," she said. "We want to show him he's wrong and see if we can finally get a law to protect us."

Clarvoe said she believes a statewide ban is a necessary first step to protect people from the cancer-causing chemicals released in backyard burning.

"This is a serious health issue and we really need a national ban, but we've got to start somewhere," she said.

At the April 7 meeting of the Otsego County Board of Representatives, state Assemblyman Daniel Hooker, R-Saugerties, said that counties and municipalities should enact local bans if they want them, but statewide legislation is not needed.

The Assembly is likely to pass a ban on backyard burning this year, but he will vote against it, Hooker said.

Clarvoe said Thursday, "I wish I'd been there. I would have asked him how you stop smoke from moving from one town or one county to another."

Clarvoe said smoke travels many miles before the noxious components in it settle to earth.

When people burn their trash, they create cancer-causing chemicals such as dioxin, she said. Eventually, the dioxin coats the ground. If it lands on fields cows use for grazing, the cows eat the poison, which becomes part of the milk eventually consumed by people.

"Children are probably the most at risk," Clarvoe said.

The Tour de Burn Barrel is being organized by BurnBarrel.org, an environmental organization based in St. Lawrence County, she said.

"The bicycle tour will travel scenic back roads following the Oswegatchie, Black and Mohawk River Valleys," the group's website states.