

The Dangers of Wood Smoke

Wood smoke contains fine particles, known as PM_{2.5} that can easily bypass the natural filters in the nose and penetrate deep into the lungs. Health studies have linked long-term exposure to fine particulate air pollution with serious health effects like aggravated asthma, chronic bronchitis and even premature death in people with heart and lung disease. Children are especially vulnerable because they breathe faster than adults, taking in three to four times more air – and air pollution- per pound of body weight.

Wood-burning fires not only impact the family members in your home, but they also put your neighbors in jeopardy. On winter evenings, air cools and sinks close to the ground, while warm air acts as a lid over the cold air. When there is no wind to disperse pollutants from fireplaces, smoke becomes trapped under this lid and can build up to unhealthy levels, affecting the entire community.

Wood Burning Rule

Between November 1 and February 28, Air District meteorologists will conduct daily forecasts of air pollution levels for the Bay Area. If air quality is determined to be unhealthy, they will declare a Winter Spare the Air Alert, during which time the use of wood-burning devices – including fireplaces, pellet stoves, wood stoves, and outdoor fire pits – is illegal. However people who burn wood as their only source of heat may be exempt from the regulation.

First-time violators will receive a warning letter from the Air District with information about the new rule, how to check the daily burn status for fireplaces and woodstoves, and information on burning smart. Residents who violate the no-burn provision a second time could receive a fine ranging from several hundred to several thousand dollars depending on the severity of the infraction.

Avoid Burning Wood

Residents should check before they burn wood by calling 1-877-4-NO-BURN or by visiting www.sparetheair.org. Other tips include:

- Switching to a gas fireplace or insert
- Ensuring your home is properly weatherized to use energy in the most efficient way.
- When burning is allowed, burn only short, hot fires using clean, dry hardwood with plenty of air.
- Never burn garbage, plastics, glossy paper or wood that has been painted or treated.

The Air District also has a rebate program for replacing wood burning fireplaces visit www.sparetheair.org for more information.