

Stage 1 Burn Ban Now in Effect for Clark County

Outdoor burning and the use of fireplaces and uncertified woodstoves is prohibited until air quality improves. Households without an alternative heat source are exempted.

VANCOUVER, Wash. – The Southwest Clean Air Agency (SWCAA) is issuing a Stage 1 Burn Ban effective at 1 p.m. today, Dec. 24, 2009 for all of Clark County due to rising levels of fine particulate pollution, a consequence of an inversion that is trapping air pollution at ground level. This means that the use of all fireplaces, uncertified woodstoves and inserts is prohibited until air quality improves and the Stage 1 Burn Ban is lifted. If wood burning is your only source of heat, you are exempt and we ask that you burn as cleanly as possible. All outdoor burning is also prohibited during this Stage 1 Burn Ban.

Due to Clark County's unique topography and the proximity to the Columbia River Gorge, some localized areas may experience windy conditions while others remain stagnant and inundated with smoke. This Stage 1 Burn Ban will remain in effect county wide until our monitors show demonstrated improvement in our air quality and weather forecasts indicate improved ventilation.

If air quality continues to deteriorate, SWCAA may have to issue a Stage 2 Burn Ban which would prohibit all wood burning, including fireplaces, certified woodstoves, inserts and pellet stoves. This would exclude homes where wood burning is the sole source of heat.

“We are hopeful that calling this Stage 1 curtailment will prevent us from exceeding the federal health-based standard for fine particle pollution,” said Bob Elliott, executive director of the agency. “Wood smoke is a nuisance and a public health hazard,” Elliott continued, “so reducing
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wood smoke where feasible benefits everyone. We are not asking anyone to go without heat, but to use an alternative source of heat if possible until our air quality improves.”

On cold nights with little or no wind, wood smoke pollution can accumulate to levels that are considered unhealthy. Fine particles released by smoke from woodstoves, fireplaces and other burning are of concern because they can reach deep into the lungs. Episodes of high fine particle pollution can trigger asthma attacks, cause difficulty breathing and make lung and heart problems worse.

These curtailments occur in two progressive stages as needed:

Stage 1: The use of all fireplaces and uncertified woodstoves and inserts is banned when pollution is forecasted to reach unhealthy levels. Uncertified units are typically older than 1990 and lack a certification label on the back of the unit. Certified woodstoves and inserts are allowed during a Stage 1 Burn Ban.

Stage 2: All wood heating is prohibited, including certified units, when the Stage 1 curtailment has not reversed the increasing pollution trend and weather conditions still indicate a high risk for exceeding air quality health standards.

These curtailments will not apply to homes with no other source of adequate heat. All outdoor burning is also banned during these burn bans.

To sign up to receive e-mail notifications of these woodstove curtailment burn bans, visit www.swcleanair.org.

Tips for Cleaner Burning:

The most complete and effective way to reduce wood smoke pollution is to use another form of heat. If you must use wood, or choose to do so when local rules permit, the following recommendations can help diminish the emissions from your woodstove, fireplace or fireplace insert:

- Only burn dry, seasoned wood. Be sure your firewood has been split and dried for at least one year.
- Never burn wet, painted, stained or treated wood, color newsprint, plastic, garbage, diapers or magazines. Items such as these produce high amounts of odor, smoke and toxic fumes. Burning these materials is illegal and also an excellent way to start a chimney fire.
- Store your firewood under cover. A shed or shelter is best. If you use a plastic tarp, allow ventilation to prevent condensation.
- Burn small, hot fires. This helps the wood burn completely and cleanly.
- Never allow the fire to smolder. Smoldering fires are the worst polluters because they burn at a temperature too low for efficient combustion. The result is more smoke—unburned wood going up the chimney, wasted.
- Do not damper too much. Allow enough air for the wood to burn fully, without smoldering. Never try to keep the fire going overnight by cutting back the air supply. This wastes wood, produces much smoke and creosote and produces little heat.
- Step outside and look at the plume from your chimney. You should see only heat waves. If you can see smoke, your wood is not burning completely. Increase the air supply to your fire.
- Size your woodstove properly. A stove that is too large for the space to be heated will have to be damped down, causing much smoke and wasting wood.
- Do not burn in moderate temperatures. Your stove will tend to overheat your house. You will want to close the dampers to cut back on the heat, which cuts oxygen to the fire, wastes wood and increases pollution.
- Don't install a woodstove until you have considered other ways to cut heating costs. Insulating and weather stripping can cost less than a stove and will reduce your heating requirements, whether your heat sources is wood, oil, gas or electricity.
- Don't install an uncertified stove—installation of uncertified stoves is illegal. These stoves are more polluting.

Founded in 1968, the mission of the Southwest Clean Air Agency is to preserve and enhance the air quality in southwest Washington. Serving the counties of Clark, Cowlitz, Lewis, Skamania and Wahkiakum, SWCAA is responsible for protecting the public's health through the enforcement of federal, state and local air quality standards and regulations.

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