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LRAPA/Oakridge Home Wood Heating Call Program Evaluated

The results are in – and one thing’s for sure, Oakridge residents are more aware of their local air quality because of an automated calling system put in place this past winter heating season by the Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority (LRAPA). In fact, nearly 40 percent of those recently polled stated LRAPA’s telephone advisory program has made them more aware of the local air quality.

Another 14 percent said they followed the advisories more closely because of the calls.

“That might be why Oakridge stayed within the federal standards everyday this past season,” said Kim Metzler, of LRAPA. “It’s the first time the city’s air quality has met the standard on a daily basis since we started monitoring fine particulate in 1999.” The fine particulate standard (PM_{2.5} – particles 2.5 microns in size and smaller) was added by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to better protect human health. Fine particles lodge deep in the lungs when inhaled and exacerbate respiratory and lung ailments.

Of the 300-plus residents polled, slightly more than half, 54 percent, said they believe the program is useful and should continue. Thirty-four percent said the program should be stopped, and 12 percent were unsure. During the winter heating season, residents received automated phone messages asking them to refrain from burning when air quality was becoming unhealthy for sensitive groups of people (those with heart or lung disease, older adults and young children). LRAPA used the call system 19 times during the four-month season.

“We knew the program was controversial,” stated Metzler. “We’re interrupting people’s personal time with a phone call. But, we had thought it might help the community stay in compliance, and it appears it has. We’re glad to know that more than half of those polled believe it is a worthwhile program. When the community learns their air quality met the health standards all winter, maybe more people will believe it’s useful.”

LRAPA is responsible for monitoring Oakridge air quality and reporting the results to EPA. Should the area be formally declared a non-attainment area, LRAPA would be required to develop mandatory strategies to get the area back into compliance.

(More)

“Our goal is to keep Oakridge from becoming an EPA-designated non-attainment area for fine particulate,” said Metzler. “We’re currently working toward getting Oakridge off EPA’s non-attainment list for PM₁₀ – particles up to 10 microns in size. The area technically meets the PM₁₀ standard at this time.”

According to the survey, about 51 percent of Oakridge residents have a wood stove or fireplace, and the majority, about 61 percent, use them on a daily basis. The vast majority of respondents stated their wood is aged, stored covered and dry.

The agency plans to work with the community on ways to improve the program prior to next year’s heating season.

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