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Home Wood Heating season begins November 1, tighter standards for fine particulate may result in more advisories

Lane County's mandatory home wood heating season officially starts on November 1 and residents may see more yellow and red advisories called compared to previous years because of a new federal standard. In 2006, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tightened the standard for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) to be more protective of public health. The daily standard has been lowered from 65 micrograms per cubic meter (ug/m³) to 35 ug/m³.

Fine particulates, a component of wood smoke, are smaller than the diameter of a human hair and lodge deep into the lungs. Wood heating smoke also contains hazardous chemical components. Studies demonstrate that wood smoke can severely impact individuals, especially those with heart or lung problems, allergies, asthma, and the elderly, pregnant women, and children. According to Lane Regional Air Protection Agency's (LRAPA) emission inventory, residential home wood heating smoke is the major source of all particulates emitted in Lane County especially on cold winter days.

The season is in affect from November 1 through the end of February within the Eugene and Springfield Urban Growth Boundary including both cities, and the City of Oakridge. The Home Wood Heating Program is in place to help keep air pollution from woodstoves and fireplaces to a minimum. Both the Eugene/Springfield area and Oakridge have wintertime air quality problems related to wood burning.

How the program works

During the four-month season, LRAPA issues daily advisories to inform residents if burning in their woodstoves and fireplaces is allowed. A simple "red, yellow, green" advisory system informs residents of the daily advisory. A "green" advisory is called when air quality is good and burning is allowed; a "yellow" advisory is called when air quality is deteriorating and burning is cautioned against; and a "red" advisory is called when air quality is approaching unhealthy levels for sensitive groups. During a red advisory, no visible chimney smoke is allowed.

(More)

“Our air quality tends to deteriorate in the winter months when we have air inversions and stagnant weather patterns - those times without much wind or rain,” said Sally Markos, LRAPA spokeswoman. “Smoke from woodstoves and fireplaces quickly builds up on the valley floor, especially when fires are allowed to smolder, or when woodstoves are damped down.”

Daily burning advisories are provided to the public through a number of outlets, including the LRAPA Home Wood Heating Advisory Line at 746-HEAT (746-4328), the agency’s web site at www.lrapa.org, local radio and television stations, and the Register Guard newspaper’s weather page.

Burn clean to minimize smoke

“To help minimize smoke we ask people to burn only clean, dry firewood. Burning wet wood provides little heat while producing a lot of excess smoke,” Markos said. If people use manufactured firelogs, LRAPA encourages the use of products that use cleaner, less odorous binders, such as the “All Natural Firelog,” by Duraflame, which contains no petroleum products and emits very little smoke. LRAPA also reminds residents NOT to “damp down” their stoves, which causes incomplete combustion and excess smoke.

Residents are reminded that burning waste paper, plastic and other trash in woodstoves causes excessive smoke and harmful pollution, is illegal, and may result in a \$500 fine.

Program exemptions are available for residents who meet low-income energy assistance guidelines for Lane County. In addition, Oakridge residents may apply for exemptions if their homes are heated solely with wood. Eugene/Springfield area residents should contact LRAPA (736-1056) for an exemption; Oakridge residents need to contact Oakridge City Hall (782-2258).

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