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Home Wood Heating Season Officially Over

The 2007/08 Eugene/Springfield and Oakridge home wood heating advisory seasons, which run from November through February, are officially over. However, residents are asked to continue to minimize burning to help reduce the impact of smoke on the community.

“Even though the seasons have ended, local air quality can still be impacted by smoke”, says Kim Metzler, of Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA). Our weather has a major influence on air quality and there is still the possibility of cold nighttime temperatures and stagnant air. During these periods, we are likely to see air pollution levels rise when woodstove use is high.”

The local advisory programs are part of a strategic plan designed to keep air quality at healthy levels. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has set national standards that all communities must meet. In late 2006, federal standards for fine particulate were tightened to be more protective of health. As a result, local thresholds for yellow and red advisories were lowered as well. The cities of Eugene, Springfield, and Oakridge have all amended their local ordinances to reflect the new standard.

LRAPA calls daily burn advisories, either green, yellow or red, to let residents know if burning is allowed on any given day. On yellow days, residents are asked to voluntarily avoid burning, if possible. Burning with visible smoke is prohibited on red days without a program exemption. The Eugene/Springfield area experienced a number of prolonged periods of stagnant air during the season. LRAPA issued six yellow advisories and one red advisory for Eugene/Springfield this season. The red advisory on January 24 was the first such advisory issued since the program's inception in 1991. LRAPA issued 22 yellow advisories and five red advisories in Oakridge this season.

LRAPA estimates that federal clean air health standards for particulate were exceeded several times in Oakridge and at least once in the Eugene/Springfield metropolitan area this season. The agency will be finished analyzing its monitoring data in a few weeks to determine exact number of excursions over the standard.

If an area fails to meet the standards and is federally classified as a non-attainment area, the area is required to develop a strategic plan to improve air quality in the community. LRAPA has already implemented strategic plans to improve air quality in both communities, including the ongoing Warm Homes/Clean Air program for the City of Oakridge.

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"While air quality is improving in both communities, the areas are having a more difficult time meeting the federal standards because they have become tighter. Every five years EPA reviews its health standards. When data from health studies show the standards aren't adequate to protect public health, those standards are tightened. That is what is currently happening with the particulate standards, resulting in more yellow and red advisories – and exceedances of the newer, more protective standard." Metzler said.

Overall, LRAPA's strategic plans are working, as demonstrated by improvements in air quality over the last several years.

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