



Date: November 1, 2010
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Lane County Media: 10-13

LRAPA's Home Wood Heating advisory begins on November 1, residents asked to follow advisories to avoid burn bans

The first cold days of fall bring the aroma of wood smoke from wood stoves and fireplaces into neighborhoods in our community. The Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) would like to remind residents about Lane County's mandatory home wood heating advisory season, which officially starts on November 1. Residents are being encouraged to follow the daily advisories, which were developed by LRAPA to reduce harmful air pollution from wood smoke. According to LRAPA's emission inventory, residential home wood heating smoke is the major source of all particulates emitted in Lane County, especially on cold winter days.

Fine particulates and toxins found in wood smoke present a serious health hazard. Smaller than the diameter of a human hair, fine particulates lodge deep in the lungs when inhaled and are not expelled. Health-based studies demonstrate that wood smoke can severely impact individuals, especially those with heart or lung problems, allergies, and asthma. Constant, heavy exposure to wood smoke can also lead to cancer. Older adults, pregnant women, and children are most vulnerable.

"Our air quality tends to deteriorate in the winter months when we have air inversions and stagnant weather patterns - those times when foggy conditions trap pollutants in the valley," said Sally Markos, LRAPA spokesperson. "Smoke from wood stoves and fireplaces builds up quickly, especially when unseasoned wood is burned or fires are allowed to smolder. Following the advisories is very important to protect public health and keep the Eugene/Springfield from violating health-based federal air quality standards. If residents can use another source of heat rather than wood during days when a yellow advisory is called, we may be able to avoid red days when burning is banned and the air quality standard is violated. Last year, Eugene/Springfield exceeded the air quality standard on eight days.

The home wood heating season is in affect from November 1 through the end of February within the Eugene/Springfield urban growth boundaries including both cities, and the City of Oakridge. Both the Eugene/Springfield area and Oakridge have wintertime air quality problems related to wood burning. Last season, 34 yellow advisories were issued for Oakridge and 17 for Eugene/Springfield. Oakridge currently does not met federal health-based air quality standards for fine particulate because of winter time pollution from wood smoke. LRAPA is working with the City of Oakridge to develop a 5-year implementation plan outlining strategies and steps to meet the standards. The advisory program is a crucial element in a successful implementation plan.

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To further reduce smoke emissions during the winter months in pollution-prone areas, other types of burning are banned or greatly restricted. Backyard burning is banned between the 1st of November and March 1 for residents of Oakridge and those living within the urban growth boundaries of Eugene and Springfield. Recreational fires in Oakridge and the Eugene and Springfield urban growth boundaries are subject to the home wood heating advisories and not allowed on yellow or red advisory days.

How the home wood heating advisory program works

During the four-month season, LRAPA issues daily advisories to inform residents if burning in their wood stoves and fireplaces is allowed. A simple “green, yellow, red” 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 residents are asked not to burn unless absolutely necessary; 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 and burning on a red day can result in a fine of up to \$500. Residents in Eugene/Springfield can expect to see LRAPA staff present in the community on red advisory days when visible emissions are not allowed. In Oakridge, City police handle enforcement and will issue tickets to repeat violators.

Daily burning advisories are provided to the public through a number of outlets, including the LRAPA Home Wood Heating Advisory Line at 541-746-HEAT (541-746-4328), the agency’s web site at www.lrapa.org, local radio and television stations, and the Register Guard newspaper’s weather page.

Burning clean is key to reducing smoke emissions

“To help minimize smoke we ask people to burn only clean, dry firewood that has been seasoned for six months or more. Burning wet wood provides little heat while producing a lot of excess smoke,” Markos said. LRAPA also suggests using cleaner, less odorous firelogs, such as the “All Natural Firelog” by Duraflame, which contains no petroleum products and emits very little smoke. Smoke emissions can also be greatly reduced by building small hot fires and NOT “damping down” stoves, which cuts off oxygen to the fire causing incomplete combustion and excess smoke with toxic emissions.

Residents are reminded that using a wood stove or fireplace to burn trash is illegal. Burning waste paper, plastic, and other trash in wood stoves or fireplaces causes excessive smoke containing toxic pollution. Burning trash can result in a \$500 fine. The cities of Eugene, Springfield, and Oakridge ordinances restrict the amount of smoke allowed at any time, including green advisory days.

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 (541-736-1056) for an exemption; Oakridge residents need to contact Oakridge City Hall (541-782-2258).

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