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Air stagnation causes air pollution levels to rise

Stagnant weather, along with colder nights and calm winds, has caused air pollution levels to rise in the southern Willamette Valley. Levels of fine particulate, a major component of wood smoke, have reached the moderate range. As a result, LRAPA has issued a “yellow” home wood heating advisory for Eugene/Springfield and Oakridge. Residents are being asked to curtail the use of woodstoves and fireplaces, which are major contributors to the pollution.

The high pressure system that has kept storms at bay has caused pollution levels to rise over the last few days” said Sally Markos, LRAPA spokesperson. “The strong high pressure system is creating an air inversion over the valley with cold temperatures at ground level and warmer temperatures aloft. Calm winds and lack of weather systems coming through is causing pollution to stay trapped in the valleys.”

Smoke from wood stoves and fireplaces is the major contributor to particulate levels in the winter. The best way to minimize pollution during this type of wintertime weather is to avoid using wood stoves and fireplaces if possible. “During a yellow advisory, residents are asked not to burn unless necessary. If people need to burn, we ask that they take extra precautions to burn cleanly by burning small, hot fires, leaving stove dampers open and allowing fires to burn out at the end of the evening to minimize smoke emissions,” Markos explained.

“During stagnant periods, fine particles from smoke and vehicle exhaust get trapped at ground-level, where they can be inhaled deeply into the lungs and damage delicate lung tissues,” said Markos. The effect can cause health problems for sensitive individuals. People most at risk are those with asthma, heart or lung diseases, and older adults and children. Anyone with these conditions should avoid prolonged exercise or heavy exertion if they experience health symptoms, and follow their doctor’s advice.

Typically, wintertime pollution levels climb during the night and early morning hours, and then drop off during the daytime hours; however, the air stagnation will cause levels to build up over several days.

LRAPA is currently forecasting moderate air quality levels for Eugene, Springfield, and Oakridge over the next few days, but that could change if weather conditions continue as expected and wood stove use increases. The agency regularly forecasts pollution levels and provides the community with a daily home wood burning advisory. Call the Home Wood Heating Hotline, 541-746-4328, or check www.LRAPA.org for current advisories.

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