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LRAPA Reminds Residents to Follow Home Wood Heating Advisories to Avoid Burn Bans

The first frosty mornings have brought a chill to most of Lane County and the aroma of wood smoke is in the air. 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 particle pollution from wood smoke. 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.

Wood smoke from residential wood heating has been identified as the major contributor to winter time air pollution in Lane County communities. A recent survey found over 16,000 homes in Eugene/Springfield have a wood stove and approximately 18,000 have fireplaces. On a worst case winter day, residential wood combustion emissions contribute 68% of the total local emissions into the airshed, which adds up to over 8 tons of particulate, almost twice the amount emitted by all industry combined. The City of Oakridge also struggles with winter time pollution from wood stoves and currently does not met federal health-based air quality standards for fine particulate.

Health-based studies demonstrate that wood smoke can severely impact individuals, especially those with heart or lung problems, allergies, and asthma. The 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. Constant, heavy exposure to wood smoke can also lead to cancer. Older adults, pregnant women, and children are most at risk.

“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. “It’s no coincidence we have seen air quality levels creep up into the moderate range on cold mornings over the last week. 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 at risk of being violated,” said Markos. 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 Novem-

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ber 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. 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. The cities of Eugene, Springfield, and Oakridge ordinances restrict the amount of smoke allowed at any time, including green advisory days.

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.

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). Exemptions must be renewed yearly.