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Contact: Sally Markos, 736-1056, ext. 217
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Cold weather and air stagnation cause particle pollution levels to rise

Forecasted stagnant weather, with colder nights, foggy mornings, and light winds will impact parts of Lane County over the next week. The National Weather Service has issued an air stagnation advisory for the Willamette Valley, with no major weather systems expected through the end of next week. According to the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA), this is the typical set-up for increased levels of pollution.

“Air quality has deteriorated overnight and pollution levels have risen in the Eugene/Springfield, Cottage Grove, and Oakridge area,” said Sally Markos, LRAPA spokesperson. “In a typical wintertime pattern, cold air will combine with low overnight temperatures to produce a strong surface-based inversion that will keep pollutants trapped near the ground.” LRAPA’S meteorological site in north Eugene shows a strong inversion has set up over the area. At this time, Oakridge is not under an inversion, but the situation will need to be closely monitored.

Fine particulate, a major component of wood smoke and vehicle exhaust, is the pollutant of concern. “Pollution levels rise when fine particles get trapped at ground-level, where they can be inhaled deeply into the lungs and damage delicate lung tissues,” said Markos. Fine particulate can cause health problems for sensitive individuals. People most at risk are those with asthma, heart or lung diseases, and older adults and children. Sensitive individuals should avoid prolonged exercise or heavy exertion if they experience health symptoms, and follow their doctor’s advice.

The best way to reduce pollution during this type of wintertime weather is to avoid using woodstoves and fireplaces if possible. Smoke from woodstoves and fireplaces is the major contributor to particle pollution during the winter months. “If people need to burn, we ask that they take extra precautions to minimize smoke by using clean, dry, firewood, burning small, hot fires, leaving stove dampers open and allowing fires to burn out at the end of the evening,” Sally explained.

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

LRAPA regularly forecasts pollution levels and provides the community with a daily home wood burning advisory. To check the daily home wood heating advisory, call the Home Wood Heating Hotline, 541-746-4328 or visit www.LRAPA.org.

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