

Wood Burning in the Bay Area

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to approximately 1.4 million fireplaces and woodstoves. In the winter months, the wood smoke produced by these devices is a significant source of harmful air pollution in the region.

In this brochure, you'll find information about the Air District's *Winter Spare the Air Alert* program and our wood-burning regulation, which was adopted to reduce wood smoke pollution throughout the region.

We've also included some general suggestions for reducing smoke emissions from wood burning.

Why is Wood Smoke a Problem?

Wood smoke contains fine particulate matter air pollution, as well as a range of organic gases, including toxics such as dioxin.

These microscopic pollutants can easily bypass the body's natural defenses and penetrate deeply into the lungs. Prolonged exposure to the fine particulates in wood smoke has been linked to a series of public health concerns, including aggravated asthma, development of chronic bronchitis, irregular heartbeats and nonfatal heart attacks, and even increased mortality rates.

Wood Burning Regulation

To reduce fine particulate pollution and protect public health, the Bay Area Air District adopted *Regulation 6, Rule 3: Wood-Burning Devices*.

This wood-burning regulation includes a mandatory prohibition on wood-burning on days when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy, as well as restrictions on excessive chimney smoke and a prohibition on the burning of garbage, plastics, and other unsuitable materials.

Winter Spare the Air Alerts

From November 1 through the end of February, the Air District will issue a *Winter Spare the Air Alert* when fine particle pollution concentrations are expected to reach unhealthy levels. During *Winter Spare the Air Alerts*, it is **illegal** to use any wood-burning devices such as fireplaces, woodstoves, or pellet stoves in the Bay Area.

Residents who fail to comply with this restriction will be subject to a \$400 fine, which will increase with any subsequent violations.

Residents whose only source of heat is provided by wood burning, or who experience a break or interruption in gas or electrical service, are **exempt** from the *Winter Spare the Air Alert* wood-burning restriction.

Eliminating residential wood burning during a *Winter Spare the Air Alert* can reduce particulate pollution by 35 tons each day.

Check before You Burn

- Call 1-877-4NO-BURN.
- Check the *Winter Spare the Air Alert* status at www.sparetheair.org or at www.4NOBURN.org.
- Listen for announcements on radio, TV, and other local media.

And for your convenience you can sign up for the following:

- E-mail AirAlert notifications at www.sparetheair.org.
- Automatic Phone Alert calls at www.sparetheair.org or by calling 1-800-430-1515.

Other Conditions in the Rule

Under the new rule, only cleaner-burning technology, such as EPA-certified wood stoves, fireplace inserts, pellet stoves, or natural gas devices, can be sold or installed in new construction or remodels in the Bay Area. The Air District recommends converting to a natural gas-fueled device.

The new rule also places year-round prohibitions on excessive chimney smoke and the burning of garbage, plastics, or other harmful materials in fireplaces and woodstoves. Residents and businesses should burn clean, dry wood in short, hot fires with plenty of air. Fires should not produce visible, dirty smoke from the chimney after the initial 20-minute start-up time.

Firewood suppliers are required to appropriately label their wood as "seasoned" or "unseasoned." Seasoned wood is dried and has a low moisture content.

For more information about the wood-burning regulation, call the Air District's Public Information Office at (415) 749-4900. To view it online, check our website at www.baaqmd.gov.

What Else Can I Do to Reduce Pollution from Wood Burning?

Burn Less

First, you can cut down on the number of days each winter that you use your fireplace or woodstove. Most of the time, wood fires are used for ambiance or serve recreational purposes rather than heating needs. And in the crowded Bay Area, wood smoke creates a serious health hazard for you and your neighboring community.

Studies also show that fireplaces are extremely inefficient heating sources, as most of the house heat goes out the chimney. It's better to practice energy conservation by installing insulation and double-paned windows.

Convert to Natural Gas

Consider switching or converting to a natural gas stove or fireplace. Natural gas inserts are hundreds of times cleaner-burning, and provide the same cozy ambiance without the hassle of storing and carrying wood and polluting your neighborhood. Contact a hearth products store for more information.

How to Comply with the Wood-Burning Regulation

Residents and business owners who own or use any indoor or outdoor fireplace, fire pit, or wood or pellet stove must:

- Check before burning from November through February. If air pollution levels are forecast to be unhealthy, the Air District will issue a *Winter Spare the Air Alert*, which bans wood burning both indoors and outdoors.
- Refrain from burning wood, firelogs, or pellets when a *Winter Spare the Air Alert* is issued. This applies to households and businesses with fireplaces or other wood-burning devices, such as hotels and restaurants. It is okay to use gas-fueled fireplaces and logs, gas inserts, or electrical fireplaces.
- Never burn any garbage, plastics, wrapping paper, or other inappropriate materials.
- Burn cleanly when burning is allowed. Burn only clean, dry wood in short, hot fires with plenty of air, in order to prevent excessive smoke from chimneys or flues.

Manufacturers, sellers, re-sellers, and installers of wood-burning devices must:

- Sell or install only EPA-certified wood-burning and pellet-fueled devices for use within the Air District. Gas-fueled fireplaces and logs, gas inserts, and electrical fireplaces are also allowed. *There is no requirement for owners to replace existing fireplaces or woodstoves when a house or property is sold or transferred.*
- Provide information to purchasers on proper installation, operation, and maintenance of the wood-burning device and on the health effects of wood smoke.

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- Provide documentation to customers that any wood-burning appliance sold is EPA-certified.

Builders of homes or commercial buildings must:

- Install only EPA-certified wood-burning or pellet-fueled devices in any new building construction. Gas-fueled fireplaces and logs, gas inserts, and electrical fireplaces are allowed.
- Provide information on proper installation, operation, and maintenance of the wood-burning device and on the health effects of wood smoke to building owners.

Manufacturers of solid fuels such as firelogs or pellet fuels must:

- Effective October 1, 2010, label the product package with information about the wood-burning regulation, reminding the purchaser that they must check the *Winter Spare the Air Alert* status before burning.

Firewood suppliers must indicate, by labeling their package or providing information upon delivery:

- Whether the wood is dry and “Seasoned” (moisture content less than 20 percent), or green and “Unseasoned” (moisture content greater than 20 percent).
- How to properly dry the wood before burning, if it is unseasoned wood.
- That wood burning is restricted and that the purchaser must check the *Winter Spare the Air Alert* status before burning.

Who We Are

We're the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). Since 1955, we've served as a regional agency regulating stationary sources of air pollution, such as factories, industrial sites, and gasoline stations. We have jurisdiction over nine counties—Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, southwest Solano, and southern Sonoma. Our regulations control such things as open burning, incineration, smoke, odors, the use of paint and other evaporative compounds, and gasoline-dispensing equipment. We also monitor asbestos removal during renovation and demolition projects.

Our Jurisdiction



How to Reach Us

Bay Area Air Quality Management District



939 Ellis Street
San Francisco, CA 94109
www.baaqmd.gov
www.sparetheair.org

Contact Information

Wood-Burning Status (877) 4NO-BURN
Wood-Burning Complaints (877) 4NO-BURN
Wood-Burning Complaints www.baaqmd.gov
Bay Area Air Quality Reports (800) HELP AIR
• Daily Air Quality Readings & Forecasts
• Spare the Air Advisories
• Agricultural Burn Days
Public Information Office (415) 749-4900
All Other District Business (415) 771-6000

Wood Burning Regulation

BAY AREA AIR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT