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Spare the Air Alert issued for Thursday due to wood smoke pollution

Use of all wood-burning devices is prohibited

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air District is issuing a Spare the Air Alert for Thursday, January 15, which bans burning wood, manufactured fire logs or any other solid fuel, both indoors and outdoors.

Smoke from increased wood burning combined with limited vertical mixing, light offshore winds and cold overnight temperatures is expected to cause elevated pollution levels. High pressure over Northern California will act like a lid, trapping smoke at ground level. Offshore winds may also transport air pollution from the Central Valley into the Bay Area.

It is illegal for Bay Area residents and businesses to use their fireplaces, wood stoves, pellet stoves, outdoor fire pits or any other wood-burning devices during a Spare the Air Alert for fine particle pollution. Exemptions are available for homes without permanently installed heating, where wood stoves or fireplaces are the only source of heat. Anyone whose sole source of heat is a wood-burning device must use an EPA-certified or pellet-fueled device that is registered with the Air District to qualify for an exemption. An open-hearth fireplace no longer qualifies for an exemption.

Like cigarette smoke or wildfire smoke, wood smoke contains carcinogenic substances, such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide, which are harmful when inhaled. Exposure to wood smoke has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses, increased risk of heart attacks and certain types of cancer. The fine particulate pollution in wood smoke is especially harmful for children, the elderly and those with respiratory conditions.

Low temperatures and calm winds trap smoke from wood burning around homes and increase fine particulate pollution indoors and outdoors. Natural gas, propane or electric fireplaces are allowed during Spare the Air Alerts.

The Air District may call Spare the Air Alerts for fine particle pollution up to three days in advance to prevent air pollution levels from becoming elevated. During an alert, the use of wood-burning devices such as fireplaces, pellet stoves, wood stoves and outdoor fire pits is illegal. In San Francisco, the National Park Service also prohibits recreational beach fires at Ocean Beach in Golden Gate National Recreation Area through the end of February.

Bay Area residents can find out if a Spare the Air Alert is in effect by:

- Signing up for text alerts. To sign up, text “START” to the number 81757
- Calling 1-877-4NO-BURN
- Visiting www.sparetheair.org or www.baaqmd.gov
- Signing up for automatic e-mail AirAlerts at www.sparetheair.org/alerts
- Signing up for automatic phone alerts at www.sparetheair.org/alerts
- Downloading the Spare the Air iPhone or Android app

On October 1, 2025, the Air District updated Wood Burning Rule, lowering the Spare the Air Alert threshold from a daily forecast level of 35 to 25 micrograms per cubic meter of fine particulate matter. Lowering the threshold ensures alerts are called earlier, before pollution builds up, protecting vulnerable residents. This means alerts will occur more often when air quality is in the mid-moderate range or above on the Air Quality Index, since wood smoke at these levels can still harm our health.

First-time violators of the Wood Burning Rule are encouraged to take a wood smoke awareness course to learn more about the health impacts from wood smoke and the weather conditions that lead to unhealthy air quality in the winter. Violators who choose not to take the course will receive a \$100 ticket. Those second violations are subject to a \$500 ticket, with the ticket amount increasing for subsequent violations.

There are also prohibitions on excessive smoke and burning garbage and other harmful materials like junk mail, plastic, wood pallets and more in fireplaces and wood stoves. Residents concerned about wood smoke pollution may call 1-877-4NO-BURN or visit www.baaqmd.gov/complaints to file a complaint or to get more information.

The [Bay Area Air District](#) is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area. Connect with the Air District via [X](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#). For more information about Spare the Air, visit www.sparetheair.org.

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