



NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wood smoke pollution rising in Bay Area *Wood burning strongly discouraged*

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is asking the public to refrain from burning tonight and tomorrow, Sunday, February 5, 2012, to prevent air quality from becoming unhealthy.

The weather forecast for the next several days indicates that the Bay Area may experience stagnant weather patterns that trap wood smoke near the ground, causing unhealthy breathing conditions for all Bay Area residents. If pollution levels continue to climb, the Air District will call a *Winter Spare the Air Alert* and the use of wood burning devices will be banned.

"Air quality is on the verge of exceeding the health standard on Sunday," said Eric Stevenson, director of Technical Services for the Air District. "We are asking people to voluntarily refrain from burning to prevent air pollution from building up to unhealthy levels."

Smoke-filled skies and cool, still air is creating unhealthy breathing conditions for Bay Area residents. Children, older adults and people with asthma, emphysema, COPD, bronchitis, lung cancer and other chronic lung conditions will likely experience difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest, coughing or wheezing.

Exposure to wood smoke—like cigarette smoke—has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses and even increased risk of heart attacks. Breathing fine particles or soot accounts for more than 90 percent of premature deaths related to air pollution.

Cold, still weather patterns will continue through tomorrow. During these weather conditions, the earth cools the air close to the ground, which creates an inversion layer of warmer air above. When there is no wind, wood smoke and other pollution trapped under this lid of warm air can build up rapidly to unhealthy levels throughout the region.

The public must check before they burn during the Winter Spare the Air season which runs from November 1 through February 29. The daily burn status can be found:

- On the Air District Web sites: www.baaqmd.gov or www.sparetheair.org
- Via the toll-free hotline 1-877-4-NO-BURN (complaints can also be filed via the hotline)
- By signing up for AirAlerts at www.sparetheair.org or phone alerts at 1-800-430-1515

Wood smoke is the largest source of wintertime air pollution in the Bay Area and contains harmful pollutants such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide, as well as toxins which are linked to increased cancer rates in adults. In the winter, wood smoke from the 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves in the Bay Area contributes about one-third of the harmful particulate pollution in the air.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (www.baaqmd.gov) is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area.

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