



NEWS

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Winter Spare the Air Alert called for Friday, January 25

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is issuing the season’s ninth *Winter Spare the Air Alert* for Friday, January 25, which bans burning wood, manufactured fire logs or any other solid fuel, both indoors and outdoors for 24 hours.

Light wind and rain on Wednesday failed to flush out fine particle pollution that reached unhealthy levels and threatens to do so again Friday. Burn bans are also currently in effect for portions of the San Joaquin Valley.

Over the past week, a high pressure system over the Bay Area enabled wood smoke and fine particle pollution to build up to unhealthy levels by yesterday morning. Despite some improvements in the evening, the daily average was high enough at several locations to exceed the federal health standard.

“We had forecast an exceedance for Wednesday, but were still surprised to see pollution levels as high as we did,” said Jack Broadbent, executive officer of the Air District. “Smoke pollution was high in many neighborhoods throughout the Bay Area on Wednesday, making it difficult for people to breathe. And unfortunately, we are expecting unhealthy conditions again on Friday.”

Rain is usually associated with good air quality, but that’s not always the case. Normally, rain in the Bay Area occurs when an incoming cold air mass clashes with an existing warmer air mass. The incoming cold front usually approaches from the ocean and is cleaner, with little fine particle content. The temperature difference between air masses promotes strong mixing of the layers, causing turbulence and winds that dilute pollution.

Yesterday, however, the incoming weather system was not very cold and had weakened as it approached from the west. The temperature difference was so slight that turbulence and winds were not strong enough to reduce pollution levels.

It is illegal for Bay Area residents and businesses to use their fireplaces, woodstoves, pellet stoves, outdoor fire pits, or any other wood-burning devices during a *Winter Spare the Air Alert*. Homes without permanently installed heating, where woodstoves or fireplaces are the only source of heat, are exempt.

Starting this winter, first-time violators will be given the option to take a wood smoke awareness class, online or by mail, to learn about the hazards of wood smoke pollution in lieu of paying a \$100 penalty. Second violations will result in a \$500 ticket and subsequent ticket amounts will be higher.

The public must check before they burn during the Winter Spare the Air season, which runs from November 1 through February 28. 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
- Via the Spare the Air iPhone and Android Apps

In the winter, wood smoke from the 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves in the Bay Area is the single largest source of air pollution, contributing about one-third of the harmful fine particulate pollution in the air. Exposure to wood smoke—like cigarette smoke—has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses and even increased risk of heart attacks. Breathing fine particles accounts for more than 90 percent of premature deaths related to air pollution.

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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