



NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 2, 2015

CONTACT: Ralph Borrmann
415.749.4900

Another challenging Winter Spare the Air season comes to a close

SAN FRANCISCO - The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's 2014-2015 Winter Spare the Air season ended February 28, with a total of 23 Winter Spare the Air Alerts issued.

A persistent high pressure ridge clung off the coast of California throughout most of the winter season blocking storms that would have helped disperse air pollution. The first half of the four month winter season had more wet days, followed by mostly dry and mild weather in the second half.

"Last year's winter weather pattern remained in place and brought with it a continuing stretch of poor air quality and no-burn days," said Jack Broadbent, the Air District's executive officer. "Even with the significant reduction in wood burning, the Bay Area still exceeded national health standards on six days, and nearly exceeded another nine days, underscoring the need to continue reducing pollution from wood burning."

Because of the ongoing health concerns, the Air District will begin the process of re-examining the existing Wood Burning Rule this spring, and may amend certain portions in order to increase its effectiveness. There will be workshops held throughout the Bay Area to receive public input during the rule amendment process.

Public workshops on proposed changes to the rule will be scheduled to begin in late March and continue throughout most of April in nine Bay Area locations. More information on the workshops is posted on the Air District website at baaqmd.gov.

Wood smoke from the 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves in the region is the largest source of wintertime air pollution in the Bay Area, containing harmful pollutants such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide. Exposure to wood smoke has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses and even increased risk of heart attacks.

Residents found to be burning during a Winter Spare the Air Alert for the first time were given the option of taking an online or written wood smoke awareness course in lieu of paying a \$100 ticket. So far this winter season, 73 Bay Area residents have chosen to take and have passed the wood smoke awareness course. This number will increase in the coming months as residents respond to violation notices received later in the winter season. Those that violated the rule a second time were subject to a \$500 ticket, with fines increasing for subsequent violations.

-MORE -

Continued... Another challenging Winter Spare the Air...

The Air District received a total of 3,739 wood smoke complaints from residents. A total of 155 tickets were issued to residents who were observed to be in violation of the Wood Burning Rule.

Preliminary survey data indicates that the Wood Burning Rule is an effective instrument for reducing particulates from wood smoke. Despite 23 no-burn days, 30 percent of Bay Area residents indicated they are burning less wood even on days when an alert has not been issued. Surveys also indicated that 75 percent of Bay Area residents support the Air District's Wood Burning Rule.

Complaints by County

Alameda – 499
Contra Costa – 576
Marin – 865
Napa – 123
San Francisco – 85
San Mateo – 423
Santa Clara – 521
Solano – 94
Sonoma – 521
TOTAL – 3739*

*No county information provided – 32

Violations by County

Alameda – 17
Contra Costa – 16
Marin – 21
Napa – 8
San Francisco – 1
San Mateo – 33
Santa Clara – 5
Solano – 6
Sonoma – 48
TOTAL – 155

The rule still requires, on a year-round basis, that residents who burn in a fireplace or outdoor fire pit burn cleanly using dry, seasoned firewood and not burn garbage, leaves or other material that would cause excessive smoke. Residents who exceed the visible smoke provision of the Wood Burning Rule could still be subject to a ticket, even outside the November–February Winter Spare the Air season.

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.

#