



NEWS

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Winter Spare the Air season comes to a close

SAN FRANCISCO – The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's 2012-2013 *Winter Spare the Air* season ended February 28, with a total of 10 *Winter Spare the Air Alerts* issued.

Cold, still weather trapped air pollution close to the ground and led the Air District to forecast unhealthy air quality on 10 days this winter. Although the *Winter Spare the Air* season began in November, stormy weather helped the Bay Area keep a clean slate in the fall of 2012, until a couple of strong, long-term high pressure systems moved in and accounted for nine of the alerts in January, with an additional alert taking place in early February.

"Thanks to reductions in wood burning as a result of the Winter Spare the Air program, we had just one violation of the federal health standard this winter," said Jack Broadbent, the Air District's executive officer. "Wood smoke has continued to decrease in the region, but it still poses a formidable public health threat in our neighborhoods and communities."

This was the fifth winter season that the Air District enforced its Wood Burning Rule that restricts the use of fireplaces, wood stoves and outdoor fire pits throughout the Bay Area when *Winter Spare the Air Alerts* are in effect. Surveys and preliminary air quality monitoring data indicate that the Wood Burning Rule has been an effective instrument in reducing wood smoke over the past five years in the Bay Area. This reduction in wood smoke has saved hundreds of millions of dollars in health costs — including hospital and emergency room visits, work loss days and costs associated with higher death rates.

Wood smoke 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—like cigarette smoke—has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses and even increased risk of heart attacks. Wood smoke pollution has many of the same components as second-hand cigarette smoke, and is equally hazardous to our health. Breathing particulate pollution accounts for more than 90 percent of premature deaths related to air pollution. In the winter, wood smoke from the 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves in the Bay Area is the single largest contributor to the harmful particulate pollution in the air.

More than 110,000 Bay Area residents are signed up for email AirAlerts, nearly 20,000 receive phone alerts and more than 187,000 calls were placed to the 877-4-NO BURN line to check the daily burn status.

This year, those 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 ticket. To date, 50 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

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increasing for subsequent violations. The Air District received a total of 2,316 wood smoke complaints from residents. A total of 178 tickets were issued to residents who were observed to be in violation of the Wood Burning Rule.

A listing of complaints and violations by county is as follows:

Complaints by County	Violations by County
Alameda - 250	Alameda – 7
Contra Costa - 371	Contra Costa – 21
Marin - 467	Marin – 32
Napa - 71	Napa- 20
San Francisco – 68	San Francisco – 0
San Mateo- 459	San Mateo – 22
Santa Clara - 290	Santa Clara – 23
Solano – 68	Solano – 8
Sonoma - 272	Sonoma – 45
TOTAL – 2,316	TOTAL - 178

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. For more information about Spare the Air, visit www.sparetheair.org.

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