



“CHECK BEFORE YOU BURN” PROGRAM

FAQ

About the “Check Before You Burn” Program

Q: What is the “Check Before You Burn” program?

A: The South Coast Air Quality Management District’s (SCAQMD) “Check Before You Burn” program is designed to protect public health by minimizing harmful wood smoke during winter months. Under the program, mandatory no-burn alerts are issued when fine particle air pollution is forecast to reach elevated levels. During a no-burn alert, residents in affected areas are not allowed to burn wood – both indoors and outdoors.

Q: How long is the Check Before You Burn program in effect?

A: The Check Before You Burn program takes place every year from Nov. 1 through the end of February for specific areas where fine particle pollution is forecast to be poor.

About No-Burn Alerts

Q: What is a no-burn alert?

A: No-burn alerts are issued by the SCAQMD when fine particle air pollution is forecast to exceed 30 micrograms per cubic meter. During a no-burn alert, residents in affected areas are not allowed to burn wood – both indoors and outdoors.

- ✓ No-burn alerts last for 24 hours and compliance is mandatory
- ✓ Issued every year from Nov. 1 through the end of February
- ✓ Affects the South Coast Air Basin, which includes Orange County and non-desert portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties

Q: How long does a no-burn alert last?

A: A no-burn alert is in effect for the 24-hour period from midnight on the day it is issued until midnight the following day. Alerts can be issued for several subsequent days if warranted.

Q: How can I find out if a no-burn alert is in effect where I live?

A: You can easily learn when a no-burn alert is issued by signing up to receive e-mail alerts at www.AirAlerts.org.

Q: What about gas-log sets and other alternatives to wood burning?

A: The SCAQMD recommends upgrading to a cleaner-burning alternative. Natural-gas log sets are up to 99 percent cleaner than burning firewood and are exempt from no-burn alerts. Manufactured logs and other wood products are not exempt.

Q: Are there exceptions to the mandatory no-burn days?

A: Exemptions to the mandatory no-burn day alerts apply under the following specific conditions:

- ✓ Households above an elevation of 3,000 feet

- ✓ Wood-burning devices that are a household's sole source of heat
- ✓ Low-income households
- ✓ Properties where there is no existing infrastructure for natural gas service within 150 feet of the property line

Q: How are no-burn alerts enforced?

A: SCAQMD responds to complaints of no-burn violations on no-burn days reported through 1-800-CUT-SMOG or www.aqmd.gov

Wood-Burning & Your Health

Q: Why is wood burning in my fireplace considered a problem?

A: Burning wood in a fireplace may provide a cozy environment, but it also contributes to harmful air pollution – both inside and outside the home – which can affect your health and the health of your loved ones.

- ✓ Wood smoke contains many of the same carcinogens as second-hand cigarette smoke.
- ✓ Each year, fine particle air pollution (from all sources, not just fireplaces) is linked to more than 4,000 deaths in the Los Angeles Air Basin alone.
- ✓ Fine particle air pollution is also associated with an increased risk of heart attack and stroke, asthma attacks and potential low birth weight in newborns.
- ✓ Exposure to wood smoke may reduce lung function and reduce the blood's ability to clot properly.
- ✓ Up to 70 percent of smoke from chimneys can re-enter a home or neighboring residences.
- ✓ During the winter, wood burning accounts for more than 5 tons per day of harmful fine particulate pollution in the South Coast region – more than three times the amount of fine particulates emitted by all power plants in the Los Angeles Basin.

Q: Is wood smoke bad for my health?

A: Wood smoke is a complex mixture of gases and microscopic fine particles so small they can travel deep into lungs, causing serious health problems. It's even associated with premature deaths for people with chronic heart or lung conditions.

Fine particle air pollution is also associated with an increased risk of heart attack and stroke, asthma attacks and potential low birth weight in newborns.

Q: What is fine particle pollution or PM2.5?

A: Fine particles, such as those found in wood smoke, are also known as fine particulate matter or PM2.5.

Q: Who is at risk?

A: Populations at greatest risk from the effects of wood smoke include the elderly, children, people with heart and lung disease and pregnant women.

As children's respiratory systems are still developing, they breathe more air – and more air pollution – per pound of body weight than adults. They are also more likely to be active outdoors.

Smoke inhalation poses a high risk to elderly adults because they are more susceptible to heart or lung diseases.

About SCAQMD

SCAQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties and is responsible for protecting public health in the region and meeting federally mandated, health-based air quality standards.