NWCAA seeks voluntary burn ban this week

Air quality expected to be hazardous in Columbia Valley, moderate elsewhere

The Northwest Clean Air Agency is asking people in Whatcom, Skagit and Island counties to refrain from burning wood this week during a period of stagnant air. Residents of the Columbia Valley area, in particular, are advised to use other sources of heat until conditions improve.

Where wood is the only option, people should burn as cleanly as possible. (See below for tips.)

The National Weather Service is predicting a stagnant air mass will develop over the area tonight and last into the early part of next week. The weather pattern is likely to cause hazardous conditions in Columbia Valley, where air quality is often worse because nearby mountains trap pollution close to the ground. When conditions are hazardous, people should stay indoors with windows and doors closed and limit physical activity.

Based on monitors in Bellingham and Anacortes, the agency is forecasting air quality in the moderate range in other areas during this period. Sensitive groups with lung or heart disease, diabetes or respiratory infections, and people who have had a stroke should consider limiting outdoor activity.

The Washington Department of Ecology uses six categories to describe air quality in the state: Good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, unhealthy, very unhealthy and hazardous.

Fine particles are harmful because they can be inhaled deeply into lungs and damage delicate tissues. Air pollution can trigger asthma attacks, cause difficulty breathing and make lung and heart problems worse. Air pollution is especially harmful to children, people with heart and lung problems and adults age 65 and older.

Even when air quality monitors show overall air quality for an area is good, a poorly managed fire can affect your neighbors. If you choose to burn, check the smoke from your chimney frequently to make sure little to no smoke is visible.

The Northwest Clean Air Agency has the authority to issue burn bans and fine violators when conditions remain poor.

Tips for reducing smoke from wood fires

The Northwest Clean Air Agency encourages people who heat with wood to convert to cleaner heat sources. If you must use wood for heat, you can take steps to reduce smoke and the health risks associated with smoke particles indoors and outdoors. These steps also will make firewood last longer and reduce the risk of chimney fires:
• Check to see if smoke is visible from your chimney. A smoky chimney is an indicator that the fireplace or wood stove is not being operated correctly. State law limits the density of chimney smoke to just a wisp.

• Only use dry wood.
• Burn a small, hot fire.
• Fully extinguish a smoldering fire.
• Consider using manufactured logs. They are made from recycled wood products and burn cleaner than cut wood, especially wet, unseasoned wood.
• Give the fire lots of air. Don’t damper it down.

Remember that it is always illegal to emit excess chimney smoke and to smoke out your neighbors. It is also illegal to burn trash.

Help is available

Incentives are available for Columbia Valley residents to upgrade to cleaner heating systems:

• **Columbia Valley wood stove change-out program:** If you meet the Opportunity Council’s income eligibility guidelines, you may be able to replace your old wood stove for a new, cleaner-burning wood stove or efficient heat pump for free. Call the Opportunity Council at 360-255-2192 to see if you qualify for energy assistance.

• **Columbia Valley wood stove change-out incentive program:** If you don’t meet the income requirements for energy assistance, you still may be eligible for rebates for replacing old, uncertified wood stoves with any cleaner source of heat. You must sign up for a home energy assessment from the Community Energy Challenge to qualify for this incentive. For more information, contact communityenergychallenge@oppco.org, or call 360-676-6099.
  
  o If you replace your qualifying, uncertified wood stove for an efficient ductless heat pump, you may qualify for a rebate up to $3,400.

  o If you replace your qualifying, uncertified wood stove for any cleaner source of heat, including a certified wood stove, you will qualify for a minimum rebate of $1,000.

More information:

• Local air quality information, including Columbia Valley: [Northwest Clean Air Agency](https://www.nwcleanair.org).
• Statewide air quality information: [Washington Department of Ecology](https://www.ecy.wa.gov).
• Health effects of air pollution: [American Lung Association of Washington](https://www.lung.org).

For additional information about the wood stove change-out program, contact Laura Curley, Northwest Clean Air Agency, at 360-428-1617 ext. 202 or laura@nwcleanair.org.

The Northwest Clean Air Agency works to protect and improve air quality for people in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties.

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**About the Northwest Clean Air Agency** is the regulatory agency responsible for ensuring compliance with federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources, the agency offers services that deal with asbestos, business assistance, climate change, indoor air quality, outdoor burning and wood stoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at [www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org).

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