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## Wood-burning limits set

### Air board OKs curbs on winter use of fireplaces, wood stoves in county.

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By an 8-3 vote, Sacramento air quality managers approved a two-stage plan to curtail wood burning in Sacramento County during winter.

New rules impose a mandatory no-burn restriction across the board on days with heavy pollution (40 micrograms per cubic meter). On less severe pollution days (35 microgram per cubic meter), only those with EPA certified devices or pellet stoves can burn.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District said that on lightly polluted days (25 micrograms per cubic meter), it would simply discourage any burning or the use of EPA-certified devices or manufactured fire logs.

"The main benefit is it gives incentives for people to purchase more fuel-efficient devices that pollute less and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and still allows us to attain standards," said Director Steve Cohn, a Sacramento City Council member. "We start voluntary curtailment at 25 micrograms and educate people well before the mandatory no-burn level."

During the winter, wood burning in fireplaces and wood stoves accounts for 49 percent of soot and other particle pollution in Sacramento.

The soot, smoke and toxic fine particles can lodge in the airways of the lungs. Air pollution – particularly involving fine particulate matter – is linked to respiratory problems, decreased lung function, bronchitis, irregular heartbeat and heart attacks, research has shown.

Under the new rules, in an average year, people with certified devices and pellet stoves would not be allowed to burn wood on at least 11 days in winter; those with non-certified devices would not be allowed to burn wood on at least 23 days.

Exemptions to the strict rules include those whose sole source of heat is the fireplace, cooking devices like barbecues and wood burning for religious purposes. Exemptions for financial hardship will also be considered on a case-by-case basis.

"I'm happy we got a proposal that takes us in the direction of improving public health," said Director Roger Dickinson, who is also a county supervisor.

But he thinks the two-stage plan could confuse residents.

"It could have been simpler and less burdensome," he said.

Air-quality officials will introduce a color-coded alert system for the public to follow through local media and the district Web site, [www.sparetheair.com](http://www.sparetheair.com).

The new limits start Dec. 1 but normally will be in place from November through February. Enforcement will be through a complaint hotline and sight violations.

Initially, violators will receive warning letters instead of fines. After the first year, they will face a \$50 fine or have the option of going to "smoke school."

The board requested a report on available funding for a public education on the "Check Before You Burn" campaign.

It also requested additional research about the impact of wood burning in rural areas, where the population is not as dense as in urban areas, and where rules may need to be adjusted.

In the San Joaquin Valley, air quality managers implemented a similar two-tiered wood-burning curtailment but exempted rural areas, which they defined as homes not served with natural gas.

Board members will review the impact of the new limits in a couple of years. As air quality standards become tougher under recently tightened federal limits, the region will need to respond with stricter measures, supervisors said.

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