Q: What is Check Before You Burn?

A: From November through February, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District’s law, Check Before You Burn, restricts or prohibits burning when fine particle pollution (PM2.5) is forecast to be high. This law applies to residents and businesses in Sacramento County and the cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento. Similar laws exist in the Bay Area and the San Joaquin Valley.

To protect public health, the law requires you to Check Before You Burn to know if it is legal to use an indoor or outdoor fireplace, wood stove, firepit or chiminea that burns wood, pellets, manufactured logs or any other solid fuel.

Q: How do I find out if I can or can’t burn?

- Call 1-877-NO-BURN-5 (1-877-662-8765) to hear the daily burn status
- Follow on Twitter @AQMD
- Visit www.AirQuality.org
- Sign up to get a daily Air Alert email at www.SpareTheAir.com – input your Sacramento County zip code and select the “Daily Air Quality Forecast” box
- Read the Sacramento Bee’s weather page

Q: Why is this law necessary?

A: Wood burning during the winter causes almost 50 percent of the PM2.5 air pollution in Sacramento County. Not car emissions. Wood burning. The purpose of Check Before You Burn is to reduce the harmful emissions from wood and other solid fuel burning to protect public health and achieve federal air quality standards. Everyone breathes unhealthy air when weather conditions trap pollution close to the ground.
Q: How do these restrictions affect me?
A: Both residents and businesses must comply with the law. Check Before You Burn to see if it is legal to burn wood, pellets, manufactured firelogs or any other solid fuel in an indoor or outdoor fireplace, wood stove, pellet stove, firepit or chiminea.

Q: How does the AQMD enforce No Burn days?
A: Enforcement is through sightings of visible smoke by Air District enforcement staff. Inspectors respond to complaints and conduct surveillance. No one comes to your door. Typically, a photo is taken to document visible smoke and a notice of penalty and violation letter is mailed to the address where the violation was observed.

Q: How do I report a complaint or suspected violation?
A: Call the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District at 1-800-880-9025.

Q: Is there a penalty?
A: Yes. First time violations will result in a $50 fine or the violator can choose to complete and pass a wood smoke awareness course. Fines for subsequent violations are higher.

Q: Are there exemptions?
A: The following exemptions apply to both Stage 1 – No Burn and Stage 2 – All Burning Prohibited categories:
• Homes where wood burning is the sole source of heat
• Financial hardship waiver approved and renewed each burn season by the Air Pollution Control Officer
• Devices that operate exclusively with natural gas or propane
• Cooking devices
• Ceremonial fires related to a specific religious ceremony

There is also an exemption during Stage 1 – No Burn days for the use of an EPA certified fireplace insert or stove, or pellet-fueled device.

Q: What are the health effects of breathing wood smoke and fine particle pollution?
A: Fine particle pollution (PM2.5) is a complex mixture that may contain soot, smoke, metals, nitrates, sulfates and dust. These invisible particles are so small they can enter the bloodstream. Breathing wood smoke is especially harmful for children whose lungs are still developing, older adults and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition.

Long-term exposure can cause serious health problems including:
• Decreased lung function
• Aggravated asthma
• Development of chronic respiratory disease in children (asthma)
• Irregular heartbeat
• Nonfatal heart attacks
• Premature death in people with heart or lung disease
• Increased susceptibility to heart and vascular disease for post-menopausal women
• Reduced blood clotting ability

Q: Where can I get more information?
A: Contact the AQMD at 1-800-880-9025; or visit www.AirQuality.org or www.SpareTheAir.com.

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1-877-NO-BURN-5 (1-877-662-8765)
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