

WOOD BURNING RESTRICTIONS IN MULTNOMAH COUNTY

Frequently Asked Questions

WINTER WOOD SMOKE POLLUTION

- Why does Multnomah County have fall and winter wood burning restrictions?
- Isn't wood natural? How can it be bad for my health?
- Who is at risk from wood smoke pollution?

ORDINANCE

- What is the wood burning ordinance all about?
- When was the ordinance passed? Was there public input?
- Do other areas in Oregon also have winter wood burning restrictions?

EXEMPTIONS

- I need/want to burn wood on poor air quality days. Are there any exemptions to this rule?
- How do I apply for an exemption?
- What about my pellet stove?
- Can I still grill and cook food?

BURN RESTRICTIONS

- How can I find out if there are burn restrictions for today?
- What do green, yellow, and red days mean?
- How are burn restrictions determined?
- On my DEQ "Oregon Air" app, it says that the air quality is good, but Multnomah County has called a "yellow" advisory for today. Why is it different?
- My personal air monitor says air quality in my neighborhood is bad but no advisory has been issued. Why?
- What if someone burns wood on a poor air quality day that is not between October 1 - March 1?

COMPLAINTS

- My neighbor is burning wood during a red day between October 1 and March 1. What can I do?
- What happens if I burn on a red day?
- Trash is being burned in my neighborhood. Can you do something about it?

AIR QUALITY

- What happens after March 1? Isn't air quality still a concern in Multnomah County?
- Isn't there more we can do to reduce air pollution in the fall and winter months?



WINTER WOOD SMOKE POLLUTION

Why does Multnomah County have fall and winter wood burning restrictions?

Wood smoke is a major source of air pollution in Multnomah County. In fact, it's the primary source of small particle pollution during winter months, even above cars and industry. When the wind doesn't move the air around and more people build fires, smoke hangs over our communities and makes the air unhealthy to breathe.

Isn't wood natural? How can it be bad for my health?

Wood is a renewable and natural resource, but the smoke it produces when burned is not healthy. The fine particulates in wood smoke, called particulate matter 2.5, or PM2.5, are about 1/30 the size of a human hair. When these particles are inhaled, they can get deep into our lungs and some may even get into our bloodstream. These particles contribute to heart and lung disease, increased respiratory issues, aggravated asthma, and low birth weight. In addition to particle pollution, wood smoke contains several toxic harmful air pollutants, including benzene, formaldehyde, acrolein, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, all of which are harmful to human health.

Who is at risk from wood smoke pollution?

Everyone who breathes wood smoke is inhaling harmful air pollutants. In Multnomah County, people with diseases that affect their lungs (like asthma or COVID-19) or heart, older adults, children, Latinx households, and people in lower socioeconomic conditions are at greater risk from exposure to wood smoke.

ORDINANCE

What is the wood burning ordinance all about?

[The ordinance](#) protects vulnerable and sensitive community members on poor air quality days from October 1 to March 1 each year. During these times of the year, air quality is most likely to be poor due to weather conditions and ambiance fires. The rule prohibits people in Multnomah County from burning wood on days forecast to have poor air quality, known as red days. There are some exemptions (see exemptions on page 3).

When was the ordinance passed? Was there public input?

[The ordinance](#) was passed in early 2018 by the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners. Public input was a strong component in its development, including three public meetings, testimony in the boardroom, a working group, expert/nonprofit and agency engagement, and an online survey. The final ordinance was stronger than some people wanted, and less restrictive than others wanted. The ordinance is health-based and designed to be protective of public health and also match state and federal definitions of air quality that is "moderate" and "unhealthy for sensitive groups."

Do other areas in Oregon also have winter wood burning restrictions?

Yes, similar ordinances are in place all across Oregon, including Washington County, Eugene, Springfield, Klamath Falls, Oakridge, Lakeview, Medford, Pendleton, and Grants Pass. Burns and La Grande have voluntary curtailment programs.

EXEMPTIONS

I need/want to burn wood on poor air quality days. Are there any exemptions to this rule?

Yes. Exemptions are provided for people or businesses that meet certain criteria. You can apply if you must burn wood because of:

- **Only source of heat:** A wood burning device is the only source to heat the main living space in a household or a commercial building. A wood burning device is not considered the only source of heat if the building is equipped with a permanently installed and working system such as oil, gas, electric, geothermal, solar or propane heating system, whether connected or disconnected.
- **Economic need:** You qualify for food stamps, WIC, low income energy assistance program, or Medicaid. Criteria for low-income eligibility are based on total household income of 60% or less than the Oregon median income.
- **Emergency conditions:** Utility service interruptions occur, energy shortages declared, or a repair of a heat source is needed.
- **Certified unit:** The wood burning device has an Environmental Protection Agency or Oregon Department of Environmental Quality certified emission rating of 2.5 grams per hour, or less.

How do I apply for an exemption?

Every year, you can [apply an for exemption](#) by filling out an exemption application, signing it, and submitting it by either e-mail or postal mail:

Multnomah County Health Department
Environmental Health Services
847 NE 19th Avenue, Suite #350
Portland, OR 97206
woodsmokecomplaints@multco.us

If you need language translation services or assistance filling out the form, please call 503-988-0035 (TTY 877-735-7525).

What about my pellet stove?

A pellet stove burns small, compressed pellets made from ground, dried wood and other biomass wastes. While pellet stoves can burn very efficiently, pellets are still considered a wood derived biomass material and fall within [the ordinance](#). However, if your pellet stove is rated with a certified emission rating of 2.5 grams per hour, or less, you may apply for an exemption.

Can I still grill and cook food?

Yes. Using a wood burning device for cooking food is exempt. You do not need to submit an exemption application for cooking.

BURN RESTRICTIONS

How can I find out if there are burn restrictions for today?

The burn status for each day is posted to multco.us/WoodSmokeStatus, at twitter.com/MultCoHealth and facebook.com/MultCoHealth. You can also sign up to receive burn restriction alerts via email or call 503-988-0035. Updates are posted by 11am each day and are from Noon to Noon.

Burn restriction days (red days) are also shared on Nextdoor, Public Alerts and local media.

What do green, yellow, and red days mean?

A green day means that there are no burn restrictions.

A yellow day means that moderate air quality is forecasted and people are asked to voluntarily restrict burning wood. Yellow days are designed to keep pollution levels low enough to avoid reaching the need to call a red day.

A red day means that air quality is forecasted to be poor and a burn restriction is in place. Households and businesses must not burn wood, unless they are exempt.

How are burn restrictions determined?

When Multnomah County issues a green, yellow, or red day between October 1 and March 1, we look at a number of data sources to forecast pollution and weather conditions for the next 24hrs. They include:

- Current particulate matter levels collected by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) at one of their maintained air quality monitors (SE Lafayette monitor)
- Current and predicted weather information from the National Weather Service (NWS), looking specifically at forecasted winds, rains, and temperature.
- Current and predicted inversions from the University of Washington's Department of Atmospheric Sciences tool (PAC NW). Inversions are when warm air gets above cold air creating a sort of cap, trapping pollution.

We use this data alongside health-based thresholds for particulate matter, based on the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), which use micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) as the unit of measurement for particulate matter. The NAAQS are designed to protect sensitive populations. For a yellow day, the threshold for the advisory period is $12\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. For a red day, the threshold is $35\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

On my DEQ "Oregon Air" app, it says that the air quality is good, but Multnomah County has called a "yellow" advisory for today. Why is it different?

The Oregon Air app is a great tool to better understand the current air quality near you, hour by hour. The application shows data collected by air quality monitors across the state and provides information on potential health risks through the Air Quality Index (AQI). The application does not include a forecast on whether or not pollution may increase throughout the day. This is why you might see a green dot on the map but a burn restriction for the day from Multnomah County.

My personal air monitor says air quality in my neighborhood is bad but no advisory has been issued. Why?

Multnomah County does not use personal air monitors in our wintertime wood smoke curtailment protocol. Personal air monitors (for example, Purple Air) offer several advantages, but also have some limitations. Personal air monitors are still being heavily researched to gain a better understanding of their accuracy, their life span, maintenance requirements, and whether or not they are representative of true concentrations (both indoor and outdoor).

Multnomah County Health Department currently relies on the [Department of Environmental Quality's](#) calibrated and routinely maintained federal reference monitors (specifically, the SE Lafayette monitor) to make calls for the wood smoke advisory program between October and March. Multnomah County is not able to make neighborhood by neighborhood wood burning restrictions.

What if someone burns wood on a poor air quality day that is not between October 1 and March 1?

Unfortunately, Multnomah County cannot call advisory days or curtailment days after March 1 or before October 1 due to the rules outlined in [the ordinance](#). Outdoor burn bans may be issued by fire departments during other times of the year.

How long are burn restrictions in place once they have been announced?

Multnomah County's winter burn restrictions begin at noon on the day announced, and are in effect for a minimum of 24 hours, and last until they are lifted. The daily status is updated by 11am.

COMPLAINTS

My neighbor is burning wood during a red day between October 1 and March 1. What can I do?

On a red day, you can submit a complaint by calling 503-988-0035 or email woodsmokecomplaints@multco.us to file a complaint. You should leave an address and any other information that might be relevant.

What happens if I burn on a red day?

If you burn on a red day, a neighbor or community member may submit a formal complaint. The first time we receive a complaint for an address, a formal letter is sent with educational material. A second complaint may trigger a site visit and conversation along with a formal letter. A third complaint and verification of smoke can lead to a fine. Always [check before you burn](#).

Trash is being burned in my neighborhood. Can you do something about it?

Every day of the year, the Department of Environmental Quality regulates the burning of illegal materials, such as trash. You can file a complaint with the DEQ at 1-888-997-7888 or on their [their website](#). If it is a red day, you can also submit a complaint to Multnomah County at 503-988-0035 or email woodsmokecomplaints@multco.us.

AIR QUALITY

What happens after March 1st? Isn't air quality still a concern in Multnomah County?

Air quality is a concern year round. Multnomah County works to improve air quality through the [wood smoke ordinance](#), reducing diesel emissions, and responding to climate change. You can learn more about what the County is doing by [visiting this webpage](#).

Isn't there more we can do to reduce air pollution in the fall and winter months?

[Multnomah County's wood smoke ordinance](#) is based on EPA best practice, but is one tool among several. Currently, Multnomah County is working on an educational campaign to help people understand the impacts of burning wood on both indoor and outdoor air quality. In addition to building awareness of wood smoke ordinance, Multnomah County continues to seek funding for a wood stove change-out program to help people who can't afford to transition to a different or more efficient heat source make the change.

CONTACT

Wood Smoke Complaints

During a curtailment period, residents can report a suspected violation to Environmental Health by calling 503-988-0035 or emailing woodsmokecomplaints@multco.us.

Alerts for Burn Restriction Notices

bit.ly/GetAlertsForBurnRestrictions

Important Links

- En Español: [Restricciones de Quema de Madera en Invierno](#)
- Wood Smoke Status: multco.us/woodsmokestatus
- Wood Smoke Pollution: multco.us/health/staying-healthy/wood-smoke-pollution
- Wood Smoke Ordinance: multco.us/file/68670/download
- Exemption Application: multco.us/woodsmokestatus



multco.us/WoodSmokeStatus