

East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee
Meeting summary
March 8, 2017

CAC Charge: The charge of the East Whatcom Community Council Clean Air Committee is to work jointly with the Northwest Clean Air Agency to develop a comprehensive, community-based, long-range plan designed to improve the air quality in the East Whatcom County Region.

Chair: Phil Cloward, East Whatcom Community Council

Members: Jerry DeBruin & David Moe, WCFPD #14; John Wolpers, Whatcom County Health Department; Mark Schofield OppCo; Veronica Dearden, Kendall Watch Community Action Group; Kurt Thompson, community member; Viktor Vetkov, Slavic Church; Wain Harrison, Whatcom County; Julie O'Shaughnessy, NWCAA

Present: Phil Cloward, Jerry DeBruin, Mark Schofield, Wain Harrison, John Wolpers, Julie O'Shaughnessy

Agenda items:

1. **Introductions** – Introductions were not necessary. Only Clean Air Committee members were present.
2. **Approval of January 11, 2017 meeting summary**
Motion:
 - Wain Harrison moved to approve meeting notes.
 - Mark Schofield seconded the motion.
3. **Open public comment** – No public comment.

4. **Announcements**

Wain – Whatcom County has interviewed candidates for the new Fire Marshal's position and is in the process of offering the job to someone. The candidate has tentatively accepted and the final paperwork is being signed. Wain has recommended that his replacement take his place on this committee and continue to attend the meetings.

This is Wain's last meeting. He will be retiring March 31, 2017.

5. **Outreach ideas**

Julie – In follow-up to last meeting, Julie confirmed with Seth Preston, NWCAA Communications Program Manager, that NWCAA aired 3 wood-burning related videos from October through February on Comcast in Skagit and Whatcom County, and on Bellingham's public station. The videos addressed health problems associated with wood smoke, how to burn a cleanly and how to properly season firewood.

In addition, Julie found a stash of DVDs that may be useful, titled "Save Money and Breathe Easier/Choose the Right wood Stove and Use it Properly". The DVD was developed by Washington Clean Air Agencies. There are two segments and each is less than 5 minutes long.

Jerry – Perhaps it would be useful to produce our own video to address these issues and have community members such as Phil in the production. Asked committee members if they viewed any of the videos on NWCAA’s website.

Phil – The most impressive PSA he’s watched was produced by the state of Alaska. It covered how to select a wood stove, what lengths to cut your wood, chimney care and creating proper draw and ventilation.

All – The committee watched the DVD and agreed that it effectively covered most aspects of wood burning and would be an effective communication tool. The topics considered important to the committee, but not addressed in the video are how to start a fire with pressed wood and firebrick maintenance and replacement.

Julie will coordinate with NWCAA administrative staff to include the DVD with any wood stove correspond or info we send. Or, if people prefer, direct them to Northwest Clean Air Agency on YouTube for viewing.

Jerry – Suggested sending the DVD to residents who received opacity warnings this winter right before next wood-heating season as a helpful reminder.

Phil – Suggested specific language for the letter to accompany the DVD that has a friendly and helpful tone.

Mark – Agreed that it makes sense to send a letter and the DVD at the beginning of next heating season. However, there may be an advantage of sending something out sooner to promote early firewood gathering or purchasing to ensure proper seasoning. At several recent home visits, not in Columbia Valley, residents had run out of wood and were resorting to burning any wood they would acquire. This included treated, wet and rotten wood. Many people may be in the same position, experiencing a depleted supply of firewood due to the extremely cold winter.

Provided an informational sheet developed by Opportunity Council staff outlining the benefits of pressed logs, best practices for starting a pressed-log fire, good fire starters, where to buy them and a diagram with lighting instructions. This may be helpful when reaching out to CV residents.

6. Biomass committee update

Phil – A sub-committee of the Washington Woodland Coop and Biomass Committee of the East Whatcom Community Council is arranging a meeting with the Port of Bellingham and the property owner of the light industrial (LI) area to discuss development of the LI parcel and how each entity may be involved. A pellet mill and log-storage area are two possibilities. Phil has researched soils, water and power availability for the LI parcel.

Phil said it would be beneficial if the Opportunity Council Energy Assistance Program was expanded to include pellets.

Mark – Pellets may be easier than cord wood to integrate into the program, although there is support for both.

Phil – Said that he is still pursuing the cord-wood concept and that Woodland Coop is working on a grant for a wood storage project.

7. Residential wood sheds; construction & delivery update

Phil – Snow and ice continue to create unsafe conditions and prevent shed deliveries. Phil will coordinate delivery when roadways are safe.

Julie – Updated Doug at Westside Building Supply of our delivery challenges and extended the rental timeline on the trailer.

8. Update on NWCAA smoky chimney readings

Jerry – Asked how many chimney smoke warnings were issued so far this winter.

Julie – To-date, 94 1st warnings and 6 2nd warnings have been issued. NWCAA inspectors conducted opacity patrol on four different occasions; one in December and 3 in January. It is questionable whether or not air quality and weather conditions will prompt another round of opacity patrol. Air quality needs to be at a declining level before opacity patrol is initiated. A concerted effort was made to cover all of the valley first before going back to any area a second time. Overall, the response has been positive and the conversations with residents as a result of the warnings had led to potential change-out clients.

Three of the four opacity patrol efforts were conducted when average temperatures were in the 20's and high teens potentially creating a worst-case scenario; very cold and calm conditions increasing the need to provide greater heat-value to homes.

Currently, there is a House Bill that proposes no woodstove enforcement by any clean air agency if the temperature is freezing or below. Not sure if it will pass, but will keep the committee updated.

Wain – Said that he heard a statistic that this is the coldest winter in 32 years.

Julie – Provided summaries and graph of:

- 2012-2016 - # of wood stove change-outs (woodstove-to-woodstove and woodstove-to-heat pump)
- 2010-2017 - # days 24-hr average were either “unhealthy” or “unhealthy for sensitive groups”

What's notable and very encouraging about the trend is the decrease, especially since 2013, in the number of days that exceeded either “unhealthy” or “unhealthy for sensitive groups” especially in light of the cold winter we had this year. Perhaps most notable is that there are **ZERO** days in the “unhealthy” range.

Jerry – Commented that this is very positive and encouraging that our efforts are having a positive impact on air quality.

Julie – If there are chronic emitters and an address is provided, an extra effort to determine what the cause and how to address it will be made.

Phil – Shared that the biggest complaint that he's heard is that fireboxes on the new woodstoves is too small.

Mark – Suggested that working closer with woodstove vendors would be beneficial to learn more about the selection process and that the selected woodstove is the best stove for that particular situation.