



1600 South Second Street  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273-5202  
ph 360.428.1617  
fax 360.428.1620  
[www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Still no burn ban, but please don't burn**

#### NWCAA can call burn bans when conditions warrant

Wondering if the Northwest Clean Air Agency can call burn bans? Yes, we can, but we aren't right now because air quality – although it's not as good as it normally is around here – isn't bad enough to ban burning.

Here's a little more information about how burn bans work and the conditions that are specific to our area:

- Burn bans are formal actions taken by clean air agencies, and the rules for how and when we call burn bans are the same for all the air agencies in Washington. Those rules are in regulation and in law – specifically the Washington State Clean Air Act.
- An air stagnation advisory is not a burn ban. It is a notice from our partners at the National Weather Service that weather conditions are conducive to the buildup of ground level air pollution. That's an important thing for clean air agencies to know. When there's an air stagnation advisory, all of the air agencies assess how air quality will be affected. We call burn bans based on air quality forecasts, not weather forecasts. While it is true that weather can make bad air quality worse, it doesn't tell you what pollution levels are, and pollution levels are what drive burn bans.
- When clean air agencies predict air quality to be worse than the standard, we can call a burn ban. Let's break that down a little: Particle pollution is the pollutant that we're talking about when we're thinking about wood smoke. The standard is 35 micrograms per cubic meter averaged over 24 hours.
- Last week, we predicted that this air stagnation period (weather pattern) would result in worse-than-usual air quality, but not worse than the 24-hour average standard (35 micrograms per cubic meter) anywhere in our jurisdiction except in Columbia Valley (which we'll get to in a minute). So far, the prediction is holding true. The worst 24-hour average we've seen at our monitoring stations (excluding Columbia Valley) is 27 micrograms per cubic meter (average concentration of pollutant).
- It's worse in Columbia Valley, and we are investing considerable time and money trying to help people there. This is a 2-square-mile valley in northern Whatcom County with a suburban level of development and lots of woodstoves. Enforcement is in the future as part of a strategic, transparent plan that we are carrying out there in cooperation with a committee of concerned residents.
- We have seven real-time air quality monitors in locations throughout our jurisdiction, all of which measure particle pollution. Because much of the winter particle pollution is generated from residential wood burning, we put air quality monitors in representative, higher-population areas. Check the monitor nearest you on our

website, [www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org). For more about monitoring, read our recent column in The Bellingham Herald: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/opinion/article35699040.html> .

- When air quality is significantly worse than usual over our region, we'll issue a notice so you can take precautions, even if the air quality isn't bad enough to call a burn ban. We live and breathe here, and we understand the health risks of air pollution, so we think it's important to let you know what we would do for ourselves and our families when the needle starts to climb on the gauge.

We hope that helps, and we hope that you continue to #chooscleanair by refraining from burning while the air continues to be stagnant.

**CONTACT:**

Katie Skipper, Communications Program Manager, office: 360-428-1617 ext. 235, mobile: 360-319-0739, [kskipper@nwcleanair.org](mailto:kskipper@nwcleanair.org)

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**The Northwest Clean Air Agency** is responsible for enforcing federal, state and local air quality regulations in Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. In addition to permitting and regulating industrial sources of air pollution, the agency provides services and information related to asbestos, indoor air quality, outdoor burning, woodstoves and fireplaces. More information about the agency is available at [www.nwcleanair.org](http://www.nwcleanair.org).