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Choose a different kind of cozy this holiday weekend

Consider alternatives to wood heating when air is stagnant

We get it. Nothing says "cozy" like a crackling fire in your fireplace or woodstove on a chilly Thanksgiving weekend.

But with the forecast calling for cold, calm air under a layer of warmer air, conditions will be perfect for trapping your chimney smoke close to the ground, and a smoky neighborhood is anything but cozy.

So the Northwest Clean Air Agency asks that if you live in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties, consider not lighting that fire. Instead, here's a list of possible cozy alternatives:

- An extra sweater.
- A warm blanket.
- Lots of hugs.
- Roasting a turkey (or vegetable-based alternative) in the oven.
- A warm cup of tea or other beverage.

Where wood heat is the only option, please burn as cleanly as possible. (See tips below.)

National Weather Service to call air stagnation advisory

We're expecting the National Weather Service to issue an air stagnation advisory for our area later today for Thursday afternoon through Sunday. During this period, most of our jurisdiction is likely to experience air quality in the moderate range. When air quality is moderate, sensitive groups with lung or heart disease, diabetes or respiratory infections, and people who have had a stroke should consider limiting outdoor activity.

In some locations with a higher density of woodstoves per square mile, like Columbia Valley in northeast Whatcom County, air quality is expected to be significantly worse.

The Washington Department of Ecology uses [six categories](#) to describe air quality in the state: Good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, unhealthy, very unhealthy and hazardous.

Check air quality often by looking at the [online gauge](#) for the monitor nearest you and take appropriate precautions.

Health risks from smoke

Smoke from any fire contains tiny particles that can be inhaled deeply into the lungs. Particle pollution is linked to a number of health problems, including coughing, wheezing, reduced lung function, asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. It also is linked to early death.

Fine particles are one of the pollutants we measure with air quality monitors at all seven of our monitoring locations in Island, Skagit and Whatcom counties. The monitors measure particles that are 2 ½ microns or less in diameter. There are about 25,000 microns in an inch. The larger particles in the PM_{2.5} size range would be about thirty times smaller than the diameter of a human hair.

The national health-based standards are no more than an average of 35 micrograms of PM_{2.5} per cubic meter of air in 24 hours and no more than an average of 12 micrograms of PM_{2.5} per cubic meter of air in a year.

Even when air quality monitors show overall air quality for an area is good, a poorly managed fire can affect your neighbors. If you choose to burn, check the smoke from your chimney frequently to make sure little to no smoke is visible.

Tips for reducing smoke from wood fires

We encourage people who heat with wood to convert to cleaner heat sources. If you must use wood for heat, you can take steps to reduce smoke and the health risks associated with smoke particles indoors and outdoors. These steps also will make firewood last longer and reduce the risk of chimney fires:

- Check to see if smoke is visible from your chimney. A smoky chimney is an indicator that the fireplace or wood stove is not being operated correctly. State law limits the density of chimney smoke to just a wisp.
- Only use dry wood.
- Burn a small, hot fire.
- Fully extinguish a smoldering fire.
- Consider using manufactured logs. They are made from recycled wood products and burn cleaner than cut wood, especially wet, unseasoned wood.
- Give the fire lots of air. Don't damper it down.

We have the authority enforce air quality laws and regulations, which include limits on how much smoke comes out of your chimney. We also have the authority to issue burn bans and fine people who violate burn bans.

More information:

- Local air quality information: [Northwest Clean Air Agency](#).
- Statewide air quality information: [Washington Department of Ecology](#).
- Health effects of air pollution: [American Lung Association of Washington](#).

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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.