

Q&A

Air Quality and Wood Burning Ordinance



What is the reason for the ordinance?

Washington County is working to improve the air quality in our community. Washington County Public Health monitors daily air quality for levels of PM2.5, a type of fine air pollution caused in large part by wood smoke. Exposure to wood smoke and PM2.5 can be dangerous, especially for children, older adults and anyone with existing respiratory conditions like asthma.

What does the ordinance do and who is affected?

The two-part ordinance aims to protect the public's health by reducing wood smoke.

1. The ordinance prohibits the outdoor burning of yard debris in unincorporated areas of the county that are also within the Metropolitan Service District Boundary. If you are eligible for curbside yard debris pick-up (regardless of whether you actually use the service), then you are within the Metro Service District Boundary. Still not sure? Check out the map at www.co.washington.or.us/air.
2. The ordinance allows the County to issue "red day alerts" when the air quality is forecast to be especially bad. Residents of unincorporated Washington County may not use fireplaces, wood stoves and wood stove inserts on these days, unless they qualify as exempt. Exemptions include:
 - a. Wood burning is your sole source of heat.
 - b. You are low-income (60% of the statewide median family income) and need to burn wood for financial reasons.
 - c. You are affected by a utility outage.
 - d. Your primary source of heat is temporarily inoperable.

Do I need to submit an application to be considered exempt?

No, there are no forms or applications to submit.

Who does the ordinance NOT apply to?

1. The open burning does not apply to recreational fires, such as backyard fire pits or campfires. It does also not apply to agricultural burning.
2. The red day alerts do not apply to pellet stoves.

When does the ordinance take effect and when does it apply?

1. Open burning rules take effect November 6, 2015, and applies year round.
2. Alerts take effect November 6, 2015, and apply November 1 through March 1 each year.

What about people who live in cities? Do the red day advisories affect them?

While Washington County's advisory may be voluntary in your city, pollution has no boundaries and we ask all local residents to limit or stop burning if possible. The City of Hillsboro has adopted a similar ordinance; theirs is effective as of November 20, 2015.

How will the community know a "red day alert" has been issued?

- We encourage all residents to sign up to receive air quality and wood burning alerts at www.publicalerts.org. You will get a phone call, text or email.
- We will issue a media release.

- We will post the daily status at www.co.washington.or.us/air.
- Follow County Facebook and Twitter pages: <http://www.co.washington.or.us/CAO/washington-county-social-media.cfm>.
- Call our Air Quality Status Line at 503-846-8744.

What if my wood stove is my only heat source?

Individuals and families who rely on a wood burning appliance as their sole source of heat are exempt from the red day restrictions.

Why are pellet stoves allowed on red days?

Pellet stoves are allowed because they produce an extremely low amount of particulate. A pellet stove emits 1/10th the PM2.5 of a wood stove and only two percent of the PM2.5 emitted by a wood-burning fireplace.

What if I have a furnace or baseboards, but use my wood stove because it’s the only way I can afford to heat my home?

Low-income individuals and families are exempt from the restrictions on “red days.”

Who qualifies as “low-income”?

Low-income means you or your family’s income is equal to or less than [60% of Oregon’s median family income](#). If you qualify for energy assistance, then you count as “low-income.” Specifically:

Family Size	Gross Annual Income	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$21,506	\$1,792.14
2	\$28,123	\$2,343.56
3	\$34,740	\$2,894.99
4	\$41,357	\$3,446.42
6	\$54,591	\$4,549.27

How will the ordinance be enforced?

Enforcement will be complaint-based. Complaints will be considered an opportunity to raise awareness and educate residents about the new rules and clean burning practices. Repeated or multiple complaints may lead to an investigation by a code enforcement officer. Although the County has the authority to issue fines, every attempt will be made to resolve violations through conversations and educational materials.

“Red day” and yard debris burning violation complaints can be submitted at www.co.washington.or.us/air or by leaving a message at 503-846-8744.

I have a huge lot and my curbside isn’t big enough for all my yard waste.

If you engage in any agricultural practices on your lot (defined in state statute as earning income from the activity), then burning waste from the agricultural activity is allowed. Otherwise, alternatives to burning include:

- Take waste to one of the [waste disposal facilities](#) in the county.
- Compost yard debris and kitchen scraps at home.
- Reuse old lumber or donate it to a drop-off reuse center.
- Use a wood chipper to make chips for mulch and compost.
- Work with neighbors to organize a neighborhood cleanup day.
- Take hazardous materials to a household hazardous waste facility.

If the alternative methods present a financial hardship, contact Washington County Environmental Health to apply for a free hardship burn permit at 503-846-8722.

What will the County consider when issuing a “hardship permit” for open burning?

The County will assess if other disposal methods have been explored by the resident and if those other methods present a financial hardship. Washington County will also assess if the burn can be implemented in a way that does not affect air quality and complies with other state and fire codes related to open burning. The application can be found at www.co.washington.or.us/air.