

Changes would better protect people from wood smoke

Ecology proposes legislation that would reduce pollution from wood stoves and other wood-burning home heating devices. These changes would better protect the public from the harmful health effects of wood smoke during the winter heating season.

In some communities, wood smoke is a major contributor to overall air quality problems that place those communities in danger of violating federal standards. Communities where air quality does not meet federal standards can be designated as “nonattainment areas.” If that happens, air quality problems must be addressed. If they are not, local businesses and communities could face serious economic impacts, such as requirements to add more pollution controls.

Why it matters

High levels of smoke pollute many Washington communities during the winter heating season and contribute to overall air quality problems. Wood smoke, combined with cold, still weather, creates unhealthy levels of fine particles in the air. This pollution can lead to serious health problems, including:

- Heart disease, heart attacks and strokes.
- Lung diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchitis and asthma.
- Pneumonia.

How to solve the problem

Ecology proposes changing the state’s wood stove laws to help high-risk communities replace the oldest, dirtiest wood-burning devices with cleaner alternatives. Though some changes to the law have been made recently, tougher federal pollution limits are now on the way. This means the state needs more ways to keep communities in compliance.

MORE INFORMATION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced plans to adopt new health-based limits for air pollution from wood stoves. Ecology expects several communities in Washington to violate tougher limits. Violations will restrict economic development in those communities until the air pollution problems are solved.

Ecology will work with local governments, businesses, and the public to reduce pollution and help violating areas comply with federal law.

Strategies to clean up the air must include all pollution sources that contribute to the problem. This is difficult in areas where wood smoke is the problem, because many of the solutions depend on changing how people heat their homes.

Contact information

Marshall Taylor
360-407-6873
Marsh.Taylor@ecy.wa.gov

Special accommodations

To ask about the availability of this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Air Quality Program at 360-407-6800.

Persons with hearing loss, call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability, call 877-833-6341.

Previous changes to the law:

- Lowered the trigger levels for calling burn bans.
- Required disclosure of uncertified wood stoves at the time a home is sold.
- Gave local governments authority to ban the use of old, high-polluting, uncertified wood stoves in communities that violate federal limits.

Ecology's proposed changes to the law would:

- **Call burn bans earlier in areas that violate federal air quality standards.** This would lower the pollution level in existing law at which burn bans may be called for areas that violate federal air quality standards. Current law contains two burn ban stages with designated "trigger levels"). This change would lower the pollution level for the second stage when the use of all wood-burning devices is prohibited (except those that are the sole source of heat).
- **Require removal of uncertified wood stoves when a home is sold.** A seller or buyer would be required to remove and destroy an uncertified wood stove when a home is sold. An exemption is included in the bill for low-income home-sellers.
- **Add an alternative cleaner source of heat for homes sold in violation areas.** If a home is solely heated by wood in an area that violates federal air quality standards, the seller or buyer would be required to add a cleaner alternative (non-wood-burning) source of heat in addition to its wood heat system when a home is sold.

Other steps

Ecology is also proposing additional funding in the state's 2011-2013 Capital Budget. This proposed funding would continue successful wood stove change-out programs and other strategies for reducing wood smoke pollution in high-risk areas around the state.