

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Q: What is Check Before You Burn?

**A:** On October 25, 2007, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District board adopted Rule 421 – Mandatory Episodic Curtailment of Wood and Other Solid Fuel Burning to reduce the harmful emissions that come from wood burning devices. The rule is in effect from November – February in Sacramento County and its cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento.

## There are four levels in the Check Before You Burn program

### Stage 2 – All Burning Prohibited

All burning is prohibited in **any device** when fine particle pollution is forecast to exceed 35 micrograms per cubic meter. It is illegal to burn any solid fuel, including wood, manufactured logs and pellets.

### Stage 1 – No Burn – Unless Exempt

It is illegal to burn when fine particle pollution is forecast to be 32-35 micrograms per cubic meter unless EPA certified fireplace inserts or stoves, or pellet stoves are used, and they do not emit visible smoke.

### Burning is Discouraged - Voluntary

Burning is discouraged when fine particle pollution is forecast to be 26-31 micrograms per cubic meter. The AQMD asks you to voluntarily not burn.

### Legal to Burn

When the forecast is 25 micrograms per cubic meter or lower then it is legal to burn and the use of manufactured firelogs is acceptable at this level. If you choose to burn please follow cleaner burning tips in order to burn as cleanly as possible.



## Q: Why is this restriction necessary?

**A:** In Sacramento County and its cities, wood burning accounts for approximately 50 percent of wintertime particles as opposed to vehicle emissions that cause our summer pollution problem. The purpose of Check Before You Burn is to reduce the harmful emissions that come from wood burning. The AQMD provides the daily burn status, which tells residents when burning is restricted or prohibited during the months of November through February.

We all breathe unhealthy air when weather conditions trap pollution close to the ground during the fall and winter months. It is the AQMD's responsibility to protect public health and achieve clean air goals.

## Q: What are the health effects of breathing fine particulate matter like wood smoke?

**A:** Fine particulate matter is a complex mixture that may contain soot, smoke, metals, nitrates, sulfates and dust. Studies have linked long-term exposure to particle pollution, especially fine particles, with serious health problems including decreased lung function, aggravated asthma, development of chronic respiratory disease in children (asthma), irregular heartbeat, nonfatal heart attacks, premature death in people with heart or lung disease and increased susceptibility to heart and vascular disease for post-menopausal women.

In addition, new health studies have shown that breathing wood smoke reduces the blood's ability to clot, and specifically for children it lowers IQ and decreases memory. Children are more likely to suffer effects because their respiratory systems are developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight.

## Q: How will these restrictions affect me?

**A:** From November through February residents and businesses in Sacramento County and its cities are prohibited from using indoor or outdoor fireplaces and wood stoves, and firepits and chimineas, that burn wood, pellets, manufactured logs or any other solid fuel on some days when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy to breathe.

## Q: Are there exemptions?

**A:** The following rule exemptions apply to both Stage 1 – No Burn **and** Stage 2 – All Burning Prohibited categories:

- Homes where wood burning is the sole source of heat
- Financial hardship waiver approved by the Air Pollution Control Officer – *must be renewed each burn season*
- Devices that operate exclusively with natural gas or propane
- Cooking devices
- Ceremonial fires related to specific religious activities

There is also an exemption during Stage 1 – No Burn days for those who have an EPA certified fireplace insert or stove, or pellet-fueled stove.

## Q: How are the No Burn restrictions enforced?

**A:** Enforcement will be through sightings of visible smoke by District enforcement staff. The locations to be observed are determined by complaints or District surveillance routes. However, typically District staff will not set foot on the property or knock on your door. They will write down the address and a notice of violation will be mailed to the occupant and property owner if not owner occupied. *Note: This is how enforcement will typically be handled. There can be exceptions depending on the situation.*

First time violations will result in a \$50 fine or a requirement to complete and pass a wood smoke awareness course. Fines for subsequent violations are higher.

## Q: How will I know if I can or can't burn?

**A:** It is your responsibility to Check Before You Burn. The AQMD provides six ways for you to find out the day's burn status:

1. Call **877-NO-BURN-5 (877-662-8765)** – this toll-free number gives daily recorded burn status information
2. Visit **www.AirQuality.org**
3. Sign-up for an Air Alert e-mail at **www.SpareTheAir.com** – simply input a zip code within Sacramento County and check the Daily Air Quality Forecast box
4. Check the Sacramento Bee's weather page located on the back of the Our Region section
5. Listen to television and radio weather forecasts
6. Follow us at **twitter.com/aqmd**

## Q. How do I report a complaint or suspected violation?

**A:** Call the AQMD at 800-880-9025.

## Q: Where can I get more information about Rule 421 or other AQMD related information?

**A:** You can contact the AQMD at **800-880-9025**, or visit the Air District Web sites **www.AirQuality.org** or **www.SpareTheAir.com**.

To Check Before You Burn, call **877-NO-BURN-5 (877-662-8765)**

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