

The 2019–2020 Winter Home Wood-Burning Season is HERE!

Please take care to reduce wood-smoke emissions from your fireplace or wood stove.

As the weather cools, home fireplaces and stoves are starting to heat up. But while a wood-burning fireplace or stove is cozy indoors, smoke from poorly managed home burning can be harmful for those living nearby.

Smoke is dangerous and can affect air quality indoors as well as outside.

Wood smoke contains a variety of harmful gases as well as very small particles that can damage the lungs, blood vessels, and heart. When too many people operate wood-burning fireplaces and stoves at once (or when wood-burning fireplaces and stoves are operated under poor conditions), locally high concentrations of wood smoke can result.

High smoke concentrations worsen air quality both indoors and out—harmful gases and particles can seep into even tightly sealed, energy-efficient homes. This creates problems for those living nearby. Short-term exposure to wood smoke can cause coughing, trigger asthma attacks, and increase susceptibility to respiratory infection. Long-term exposure can reduce lung function and increase the likelihood of heart attacks and lung cancer. These risks are especially acute for children, the elderly, and those with prior respiratory and/or circulatory conditions.

If you own a wood-burning fireplace or stove, take these steps to burn cleanly and responsibly.

- 1) Burn only seasoned, dry hardwood like oak, almond, or walnut instead of softer woods like fir or pine.** Properly dried and seasoned hardwood produces much less smoke than wet wood or softwood. Artificial logs such as Duraflame logs are also a good option. Look for artificial logs made out of 100% compressed sawdust.
- 2) Burn at a high enough temperature to achieve complete combustion.** Smoldering fires produce smoke containing much greater concentrations of harmful gases and particles. Keep your fire burning bright when you're using it, and put it out completely when you're done. (completely extinguishing fire is also an important safety precaution!)
- 3) Do NOT burn when the weather is foggy, wind speeds are low, or air quality is already poor.** Fog is an indication of an air inversion. Both air inversions and low wind speeds prevent wood smoke from dispersing. Avoid burning under these weather conditions and when the Yolo Solano Air Quality Management District (YSAQMD) issues a "*Don't Light Tonight*" alert. Subscribe to be notified by email or text of poor wood-burning weather conditions by visiting the YSAQMD website at <http://ysaqmd.enviroflash.org/>.
- 4) Consider installing or switching out your wood-burning appliance.** Alternatives include an electric fireplace (cleanest and lowest carbon option), a pellet stove (next-cleanest option), or a more efficient, EPA-approved wood stove. Each of these will provide the ambiance and heat of a wood-burning fireplace or older wood stove while producing just a fraction of the harmful wood smoke.

If you or someone you know is suffering from excessive smoke exposure, take these steps to seek relief.

First steps

If smoke from a neighbor's wood-burning fireplace or stove is causing you harm, the first step is to initiate a polite, friendly conversation. The conversation can begin with a statement like, "I'm not sure you're aware..." The person creating the harmful smoke may not recognize that their burning is creating a problem. Briefly explain how you are being affected and ask whether your neighbor would be willing to cut down on burn time and/or take steps (such as those outlined above) to burn more cleanly.

City resources

If a conversation is not enough to resolve the smoke issue, the City of Davis offers recourse. The City's 'Nuisance Abatement Ordinance Burning' prohibits the emission into the open air of visible smoke from certain residential, indoor wood-burning appliances when that smoke could "endanger the health, comfort, safety or welfare of any reasonable person,...cause unreasonable injury or damage to property...[or] cause annoyance or discomfort in the area of the emission."

Under the ordinance, any person owning, leasing, occupying and/or having charge or possession of any premises or land in Davis may be held responsible for addressing harmful effects of smoke from residential burning. Failure to comply with the ordinance may result in fines and/or other enforcement actions. (See <https://www.cityofdavis.org/city-hall/police-department/code-enforcement/nuisance-burning> for more information).

Investigations into nuisance violations are initiated on a complaint basis. Call the police department at (530) 747-5400. A dispatcher will ask for your information along with the address of the property where the smoke is coming from and details regarding the violation. The dispatcher will ensure your call is properly forwarded to either a code-enforcement officer or a police officer for response.

Note that it is City policy to make every effort to keep complainant information anonymous. However, the reporting party must provide their name, address, and phone number before action is taken.

Please think of your family and your neighbors if you enjoy your wood-burning fireplaces or stoves this winter!