

# Questions and Answers About...

## The Tacoma-Pierce County Clean Air Task Force Recommendations

The Tacoma-Pierce County Clean Air Task Force recommends three main strategies to reduce fine particle pollution and bring the region into attainment of federal air quality standards. The recommendations represent the culmination of seven months of review and analysis by the Task Force, a diverse cross-section of community leaders representing Pierce County residents. Here are answers to your frequently asked questions about the Task Force recommendations.

### What has the Task Force recommended?

**Are you going to ban burning?** The Tacoma-Pierce County Clean Air Task Force has recommended three major strategies for reducing harmful wintertime fine particle pollution in our community:

**Strategy 1: Enhance Enforcement of Air Quality Burn Bans.** This strategy would involve coordination between the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency and other partners to arrange for temporary, part-time staff to enforce existing air quality burn ban rules and regulations.

**Strategy 2: Require the Removal of Uncertified Wood Stoves and Inserts by a Certain Date.** This strategy would require removal of the oldest, most polluting wood stoves and inserts from use within the nonattainment area by a certain date in the future.

**Strategy 3: Reduce Pollution from Gasoline Vehicles, Diesel Vehicles, Industries, Ships.** This strategy calls for approximately one-quarter to one-third of the reductions needed to meet the federal fine particle pollution standard to be achieved through new federal regulations and local initiatives related to gasoline and diesel engines, ships, and industry.

The Task Force has not recommended a ban on all burning in Pierce County, nor have they recommended any permit system for the operation of wood stoves. Their full recommendations can be found online at [www.cleanairpiercecounty.org](http://www.cleanairpiercecounty.org).

**Where will the new rules be applied?** The Task Force's recommendations and the pollution-reducing actions outlined in the State Implementation Plan (or "SIP") will be applied within the Tacoma-Pierce County fine particle nonattainment area. The nonattainment area was mapped to include the area with poor air quality, as well as the contributing sources of pollution. The Tacoma-Pierce County nonattainment area covers

most urbanized areas of Pierce County west of the Puyallup River valley to Puget Sound, including the communities of Tacoma, University Place, Steilacoom, Lakewood, Fircrest, Milton, Puyallup, Fife, Edgewood and portions of unincorporated Pierce County. For a map of the area, please see [www.cleanairpiercecounty.org](http://www.cleanairpiercecounty.org).

**Economic times are tough and people need to stay warm. Who will pay for this?** Cleaning up our air will not be inexpensive, but there are also real economic impacts associated with NOT addressing our pollution problem. These include stricter air quality regulations for businesses, potential loss of future federal transportation funding, and the cost of health care for those affected by poor air quality.

The underlying goal of these pollution-reducing strategies is clean air and warm homes. The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency is exploring a variety of options for funding these pollution-reducing strategies, including providing incentives and other financial assistance, particularly for fixed- and low-income households and those where wood burning is the only adequate source of heat. Financial assistance could include help with the removal of the device, replacement with a cleaner heat source, help with home weatherization, and/or other assistance.

Approximately \$1 million will soon be available to help with the removal of uncertified wood stoves and inserts. Contact the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency or visit [www.pscleanair.org/woodstove](http://www.pscleanair.org/woodstove) to sign up for notification.

**Can't we clean up our air through voluntary measures and incentives, rather than rules and regulations?** Outreach and education will be a significant part of the solution for reducing air pollution in Tacoma and Pierce County. However, the federal Clean Air Act requires that the majority of clean-up actions outlined in the State Implementation Plan be enforceable.

All voluntary actions to help reduce wood smoke pollution – by burning cleanly, obeying burn bans and choosing a cleaner heating source – will help to minimize the need for more intrusive measures in the future.

### How do I know if my wood stove is certified?

**Will I get to keep it?** Sometimes it's difficult to tell whether a wood stove is certified or not. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires manufacturers of wood stoves to ensure (or "certify") that wood stoves sold in the United States comply with the EPA particulate emissions guidelines in the Clean Air Act. Certified wood stoves and fireplace inserts are designed to emit less pollution than older, uncertified devices.

Wood stoves and inserts manufactured before 1988 are considered "uncertified" and are highly polluting. Certified stoves and inserts newer than 1988 will include a metal label on the back indicating they comply with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emission standards.

If you can't find or see the label but know the model and manufacturer's name for your wood stove, you can consult a listing of certified wood burning devices for the State of Washington on the Department of Ecology's website ([http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/indoor\\_woodsmoke/wood\\_smoke\\_page.htm](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/indoor_woodsmoke/wood_smoke_page.htm)). Traditional, open-hearth fireplaces are not certified.

The Tacoma-Pierce County Clean Air Task Force has recommended requiring the removal of older, more polluting uncertified stoves from the nonattainment area by August 2015. Use of certified stoves and inserts will continue to be allowed, but burn ban rules will continue to be enforced and it is still illegal to generate excess smoke. For more information about wood burning and the law, visit <http://www.pscleanair.org/airq/burnban/>.

### Is wood smoke REALLY the problem? Isn't most of our pollution from vehicles and industry?

Fine particle pollution is associated with combustion (burning) of fuels such as wood, diesel and gasoline. Each source of pollution has its own "chemical fingerprint," which can be analyzed to help us figure out where the pollution is coming from. For example, wood smoke is high in organic carbon, while diesel truck emissions are high in elemental carbon. Analysis of air samples collected in our region has shown that more than half of our wintertime fine particle pollution is from wood smoke concentrated in residential areas – not from transportation or industry in commercial areas.

It's true that in the last century more of our wintertime pollution came from cars, trucks and businesses. However, regulations associated with the federal Clean

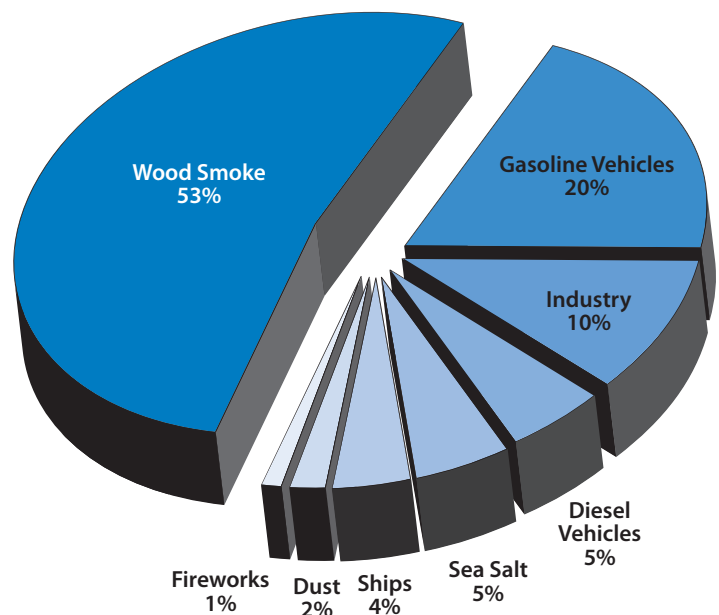
Air Act have helped to significantly clean up these pollution sources over the last 40 years. These sources are expected to get even cleaner in the future because of changes in technology, new fuel efficiency standards and other improvements. During the summertime, wood burning is not as common and transportation and industrial sources make up a larger slice of the "pollution pie." However, our air quality is generally good during the summer months and fine particle pollution is of less concern than during the fall and winter months.

### How can we have an air quality problem when it rains so much here?

We typically do receive a lot of rain in the Pacific Northwest, which flushes out pollution and results in good air quality for most of the year. We also usually have good breezes and wind to keep pollution levels down by bringing cleaner air into our region.

Unfortunately, for a few weeks each year, we experience dry and stagnant (windless) conditions that can cause air quality problems. These meteorological "temperature inversions" are associated with cold temperatures and little or no air movement. During these periods, air pollution is trapped closer to the ground and pollution levels build high enough to present a public health concern. When this happens in the wintertime, more people are burning wood to heat their homes and the

### Sources of wintertime fine particle pollution in South End Tacoma/Pierce County



pollution from wood smoke can cause our air quality to decline very quickly and reach unhealthy levels in a matter of a few hours.

**What can I do about the smoke from my neighbor's chimney?** If you are bothered by smoke from a neighbor's indoor fire: If possible, a good first step is to approach your neighbor personally and let them know their burning is impacting you. Neighbor-to-neighbor communication can often be more effective than regulatory action. Many times people are just not aware that their fire is bothering anyone. You can also contact the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency to request information to share with your neighbors. Visit [www.pscleanair.org](http://www.pscleanair.org) and click on "News, Events and Library" to find a list of fact sheets to download and print.

As a next resort, you may file a wood smoke complaint against them with the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. Anonymous complaints are accepted during burn bans only; outside of burn ban periods, anonymous complaints are not accepted. Due to the volume of complaints we receive and the amount of time it takes to process them, we want to focus our complaint response resources on complaints and situations where complainants are willing to provide information to the agency, and be involved and available for follow up questions and discussions. Formal complaints must be made in writing and are subject to public records requests. Contact the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency at (800)552-3565 or send an email to [inspection@pscleanair.org](mailto:inspection@pscleanair.org) for more information.

**What can I do if my neighbor is burning yard waste, trash, or has a smoky recreational fire?** If you are bothered by smoke from a neighbor's outdoor fire: Like with indoor burning, it is an ideal first step to approach your neighbor and let them know their burning is impacting you. You may also obtain educational information from [www.pscleanair.org/outdoorfires](http://www.pscleanair.org/outdoorfires) to share with your neighbor.

Rules on outdoor burning are enforced by your local fire department. If you are being impacted by a fire in progress, call 9-1-1 to report it. Burning trash is always illegal, as is land-clearing burning. Also, burning of woody debris for disposal purposes (such as storm blow-down or blackberry brambles) is not allowed within the nonattainment area or any urbanized area.

## **How do I know when a burn ban is in effect?**

The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency calls air quality burn bans when pollution is forecasted or has already built up to unhealthy levels. This typically occurs when our wintertime weather is the nicest – on cold, clear and windless days. Burn ban violations are subject to a civil penalty of \$1,000 and it's up to you to know when you can legally burn and how to do it cleanly.

We coordinate with local media, community blogs and our partner organizations to get the word out when burn bans are in effect. However, the most accurate and up-to-date information is always available by connecting with us directly. Burn ban notifications are sent out via email and are posted to our Facebook page and to our agency Twitter followers. Sign up at [www.pscleanair.org/signup](http://www.pscleanair.org/signup) to receive notice when burn bans are called and cancelled. Notices about burn bans are posted online at [www.pscleanair.org](http://www.pscleanair.org) and on a toll-free air quality information line at (800)595-4341.

Learn more at  
[www.cleanairpiercecounty.org](http://www.cleanairpiercecounty.org).