

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is Check Before You Burn?

From November through February, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (Sac Metro Air District) law, Check Before You Burn, restricts or prohibits burning when fine particle pollution (PM2.5) is forecast to be high. This law applies to residents and businesses in Sacramento County, including those in the cities of Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Rancho Cordova and Sacramento. The program's purpose is to **prevent** unhealthy air quality in our communities when weather conditions are expected to trap pollution close to the ground. Similar laws exist in the San Francisco Bay Area and San Joaquin Valley.

2. Are there only two categories (burn/no burn)?

No, the District has four categories:

- **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's illegal to burn any solid fuel, including wood, manufactured logs and pellets.
- **Stage 1 – No Burn Unless Exempt**
It's illegal to burn when fine particle pollution is forecast to be 32 – 35 micrograms per cubic meter. EPA certified fireplace inserts or stoves or pellet stoves may be used if they do not emit visible smoke.
- **Burning is Discouraged – Voluntary**
You are asked to voluntarily not burn when fine particle pollution is forecast to be 26 – 31 micrograms per cubic meter.
- **Legal to Burn**
There are no restrictions.

3. How do I find out if I can or can't burn?

- Download the **FREE Sacramento Region Air Quality app**
- Call **1-877-NO-BURN-5** (1-877-662-8765)
- Follow on **Twitter @AQMD**
- Visit **www.AirQuality.org**
- Sign up to get a daily Air Alert email at **www.SpareTheAir.com** – input your Sacramento County zip code and check the "Daily Air Quality Forecast" box
- Read The Sacramento Bee's weather page

4. Why is this law necessary?

Wood burning during the winter causes over 50 percent of the PM2.5 air pollution in Sacramento County. The purpose of Check Before You Burn is to reduce the harmful emissions from wood and other solid fuel burning to protect public health and achieve federal air quality standards. Everyone breathes unhealthy air when weather conditions trap pollution close to the ground.

5. How do these restrictions affect me?

Both residents and businesses must comply with the law. Make sure you Check Before You Burn to see if it is legal to burn wood, pellets, manufactured logs or any other solid fuel in an indoor or outdoor fireplace, wood stove, pellet stove, fire pit or chiminea.

6. How does the Sac Metro Air District enforce No Burn days?

Enforcement is through sightings of visible smoke by enforcement staff. Inspectors respond to complaints and conduct surveillance. No one comes to your door. Typically, a photo is taken to document visible smoke and a notice of penalty and violation letter is mailed to the address where the violation was observed.

7. How do I report a complaint or suspected violation?

Call the Sac Metro Air District at **1-800-880-9025** or submit a complaint online at <http://www.airquality.org/Residents/Complaints>.

8. Is there a penalty?

Yes. First time violations will result in a \$50 fine, or you may take and pass a wood smoke awareness exam. Fines for subsequent violations are higher.

9. Are there exemptions?

The following 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 and renewed each burn season by the Air Pollution Control Officer
- Devices that operate exclusively with natural gas or propane
- Cooking devices

There is also an exemption during Stage 1 – No Burn days if you use an EPA certified fireplace insert or stove, or pellet-fueled device as long as it does not emit visible smoke.

10. What are the health effects of breathing wood smoke and fine particle pollution?

Fine particle pollution (PM2.5) may contain soot, smoke, metals, nitrates, sulfates and dust. These invisible particles are so small they can enter the bloodstream. Breathing wood smoke is especially harmful for children whose lungs are still developing, older adults and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition.

Long-term exposure can cause 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
- Increased susceptibility to heart and vascular disease for post-menopausal women
- Reduced blood clotting ability

11. Where can I get more information?

Contact Sac Metro Air District at **1-800-880-9025**, or visit **www.AirQuality.org**.