



Focus on Recreational Fires

Proposed rule revisions re: Campfires in Lacey, Olympia, & Tumwater

Situation

During late 1980s, urban Thurston County exceeded federal ambient air quality standards for Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) pollution. One of the tools the EPA approved for improving air quality was a ban on ALL forms of wood burning – including small recreational fires – in the cities of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater.

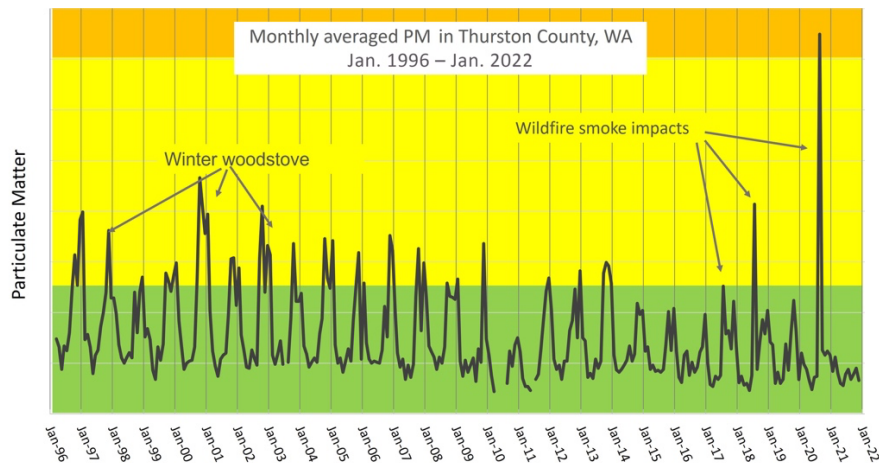
Air quality monitoring data shows that the high levels of particulate matter in urban Thurston County were caused primarily by wood stoves used for home heating – the highest concentrations were measured in between November and March each year.



Air Quality Background

The unhealthy levels of particulate matter (PM) pollution in the 1980s and 1990s stemmed largely from the use of wood burning devices for home heating during the cooler months. That is, *the use of woodstoves and fireplaces accounted for the worst air pollution periods each year*. To resolve the problem, however, all forms of burning, regardless of season, were targeted for smoke reduction, including outdoor recreational fires in the warm months. ORCAA and the Department of Ecology (ECY) successfully addressed the task of staying within federal air quality standards largely by tightening standards on wood stoves, creating a wood stove replacement program, and reducing residential yard waste burning.

Over the last decade, ORCAA has used funding from a state Wood Smoke Reduction Grant program to remove more than 628 old, uncertified wood stoves in Thurston County, primarily within the three cities and their urban growth areas (UGAs). The total PM levels have declined substantial since 1996. See figure below.



The ban on recreational fires within the three Thurston County cities has outlived its usefulness. Today, that ban creates an extra layer of rules that complicates enforcement efforts of ORCAA, fire departments, and law enforcement. By removing the recreational fire ban, ORCAA and Thurston County Fire agencies can focus on specific smoke and fire problems. All city and county fire safety regulations as well as ORCAA’s nuisance smoke rules will remain unchanged.



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Key Facts

- The problem that resulted in the ban on recreational fires occurred more than 20 years ago.
- The cause of the problem was wood smoke in general, and more specifically, indoor wood burning for home heating.
 - The use of woodstoves and fireplaces historically account for the worst air pollution periods annually.
 - Outdoor burning contributes to the overall PM pollution levels, but the most severe episodes of elevated PM levels occur during the winter months when outdoor burning is less frequent, while indoor burning is common.
 - In recent years, wildfire smoke – sometimes generated as far away as California, Montana, and northern British Columbia – has caused elevated PM levels during summer months, when local fires may be banned for fire safety reasons.
- The ban is no longer needed for maintaining healthy air quality in our area.
 - Recreational fires had a very minor impact on overall PM levels, but their ban was included in the rules merely to maintain a broad and fair approach to meeting air quality standards.
 - Lifting the ban on recreational fires makes it easier to focus on actual smoke and fire violations.
 - Lifting the ban on recreation fires in the three cities brings local burning rules into alignment with state laws and makes them consistent across ORCAA's jurisdiction.
 - Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater are the *only* cities in Western Washington that have a ban on recreational fires.
 - Cities may enact local ordinances and code updates to ensure fire safety remains top priority. For example, many western Washington cities include 15- to 25-foot setbacks from existing structures and/or trees for recreational fires.
 - Any Burn Bans called for fire safety or air quality reasons override any fire allowance.

