



# NEWS

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**March 1, 2012**

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## **Challenging Winter Spare the Air season closes** *Long-term trends emerge showing significant wood smoke reduction*

**SAN FRANCISCO** – The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's 2011-2012 *Winter Spare the Air* season ended February 29 with the issuance of 15 *Winter Spare the Air Alerts*, the highest number of alerts in five years.

This winter's dry, stagnant weather trapped air pollution throughout the Bay Area, resulting in 15 alerts, 10 days that exceeded the national air quality health standard and another nine days that nearly exceeded the standard.

"It was a tough winter for air quality and public health, but things could have been much worse," said Jack Broadbent, the Air District's executive officer. "Wood burning overall is decreasing, but we still see unhealthy levels in certain neighborhoods throughout the Bay Area."

Wood smoke is the largest source of wintertime air pollution in the Bay Area and contains harmful pollutants such as particulate matter and carbon monoxide. Particulate matter is a dangerous air pollutant that is linked to respiratory illnesses such as asthma, bronchitis and lung disease. In the winter, wood smoke from the 1.4 million fireplaces and wood stoves in the Bay Area contributes to the harmful particulate pollution in the air.

This was the fourth winter season that the Air District enforced a regulation that restricts wood burning in fireplaces, wood stoves and outdoor fire pits throughout the Bay Area when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy. Exposure to wood smoke—like cigarette smoke—has been linked to serious respiratory illnesses and even increased risk of heart attacks. Breathing fine particles or soot accounts for more than 90 percent of premature deaths related to air pollution.

More than 110,000 Bay Area residents are signed up for email AirAlerts, nearly 19,000 receive phone alerts and 263,973 calls were placed to the 877-4-NO BURN line to check the daily burn status. Air District survey data preliminary results indicate that 25 percent of Bay Area households reduced their wood burning because of the *Winter Spare the Air* program and 75 percent of respondents indicated that they supported the Wood Burning Rule.

Those found to be burning during a *Winter Spare the Air Alert* were issued a warning letter for a first offense and those that violated the rule more than once were subject to a \$400 ticket. The Air District received a total of 3,777 wood smoke complaints from residents. A total of 346 warning letters were sent to residents who were observed to be in violation of the Wood Burning Rule, and 13 tickets have been issued in Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Sonoma counties.

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A listing of complaints and warning letters issued by county is as follows:

<b>Complaints by County</b>		<b>Warning Letters by County</b>	
Alameda	450	Alameda	10
Contra Costa	622	Contra Costa	57
Marin	863	Marin	48
Napa	178	Napa	51
San Francisco	86	San Francisco	1
San Mateo	470	San Mateo	31
Santa Clara	558	Santa Clara	32
Solano	118	Solano	8
Sonoma	409	Sonoma	108
None Listed	23		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,777</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>346</b>

The rule still requires, on a year-round basis, that residents who burn in a fireplace or outdoor fire pit burn cleanly using dry, seasoned firewood and not burn garbage, leaves or other material that would cause excessive smoke. Residents that exceed the visible smoke provision of the Wood Burning Rule could still be subject to a ticket, even outside the November–February Winter Spare the Air season.

New preliminary air quality monitoring data has indicated air pollution from wood smoke is down 15 percent over the past five years in the Bay Area. This data tracks the Air District’s survey data that shows one-quarter of Bay Area residents have reduced their wood burning, even when wood burning was allowed. Based on calculations from the Air District’s Clean Air Plan, this reduction in wood smoke has saved \$300 million in health costs — including hospital and emergency room visits, work loss days and costs associated with higher death rates.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District ([www.baaqmd.gov](http://www.baaqmd.gov)) is the regional agency responsible for protecting air quality in the nine-county Bay Area.

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