

Burn Ban FAQs



Frequently Asked Questions about Air Quality Burn Bans

What is a burn ban?

An air quality burn ban is a mandatory, yet temporary, order that restricts the use of wood stoves and fireplaces, as well as outdoor burning, when air quality is degraded and human health may be adversely impacted. For more information, visit: www.pscleanair.org/burnban.

Air quality burn bans typically occur during fall and winter months and may last for up to a week or more. For more information on the history of burn bans, visit www.pscleanair.org/airq/burnban/historicalrecord.aspx.

Who can issue a burn ban?

The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency has regulatory authority to issue burn bans in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties, in accordance with RCW 70.94.473.

Why do you call burn bans?

The smoke from burning wood and wood-based products contains fine particles (soot) and a toxic mix of other carcinogens. This pollution is harmful to your health, particularly for young children, older adults and people with respiratory and heart disease. During stagnant weather conditions, concentrations of wood smoke can reach harmful levels, so we restrict wood smoke emissions to protect air quality in our neighborhoods and the health of those living there.

Where do you call burn bans?

The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency calls air quality burn bans for King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Burn bans are called on a countywide basis. Air quality burn bans for areas outside Puget Sound Clean Air Agency's jurisdiction are issued by other local air agencies, the Washington Department of Ecology or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

How are burn ban conditions determined?

Following state burn ban requirements:

- We issue Stage 1 burn bans on the basis of weather conditions and rising pollution levels – when we predict we may violate air quality standards.
- We issue Stage 2 burn bans when fine particle pollution levels reach a trigger value set by state law.

We issue these bans based on the air quality conditions in the individual counties within our jurisdiction. As a result, one or more counties may have a Stage 1 burn ban in place while another county has advanced to a Stage 2 burn ban. Or one county may have a burn ban in effect while others have no restrictions in place. Visit www.pscleanair.org/airq/burnban/background.aspx for more information.

How can I find out when a burn ban has been issued or cancelled?

1. Sign up for electronic notification, either by email or by following us on Facebook or Twitter. You'll be among the first to know when burn bans are issued and cancelled. <http://www.pscleanair.org/news/agencynews.aspx>

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2. Check the **Air Actions** box in the upper right corner of our home page and most pages on our Web site for burn ban status. This box is always current.
3. Call our burn ban hotline at 1(800)595-4341.

What's the difference between a Stage 1 and Stage 2 burn ban?

- During a **Stage 1** burn ban:
 - No burning is allowed in wood-burning fireplaces, uncertified wood stoves or uncertified fireplace inserts unless this is your only adequate source of heat.
 - Even those using a certified device or those for whom this is their only adequate source of heat cannot generate visible smoke.
 - All outdoor burning is prohibited, even in areas where outdoor burning is not permanently banned. This includes wood- and charcoal-fueled recreational fires.
- During a **Stage 2** burn ban:
 - No burning is allowed in ANY wood-burning fireplaces, wood stoves or fireplace inserts (certified or uncertified) or pellet stoves, unless this is your only adequate source of heat.
 - Even those for whom this is their only adequate source of heat cannot generate visible smoke.
 - All outdoor burning is prohibited, even in areas where outdoor burning is not permanently banned. This includes wood- and charcoal-fueled recreational fires.

How do you know if I'm violating the burn ban?

Where there is smoke, there is likely fire -and non-compliance with the burn ban. Our agency inspectors are trained to read the density, or "opacity," of smoke and to determine if visible smoke violates the state's opacity laws. It is **always** illegal to generate excessive smoke, defined as 20 percent opacity or more for more than six consecutive minutes, even when a burn ban is not in effect. If you have a device that is legal to use during a Stage 1 burn ban or if this is your only adequate source of heat, you still must burn cleanly and not emit visible smoke. Remember, excessive smoke is illegal at any time, from any device.

How do I burn cleanly and not emit visible smoke?

Make sure you are using only seasoned, dry firewood or compressed energy logs. Don't damper down your stove— limiting the air to your fire will cause smoke. Check your chimney periodically. If you see smoke, your fire needs more air. We have a short video that you can view to make sure you are getting the most heat out of your stove while producing little or no smoke. Find it, as well as tips for minimizing smoke, illustrations of legal and illegal smoke densities, and links to more information at <http://www.pscleanair.org/actions/woodstoves/>

What is the penalty for violating a burn ban?

If our inspectors observe a burn ban violation, they will issue a Notice of Violation to the property owner. Notices of Violation carry a maximum fine of up to \$1,000.

How can I tell if my wood stove or fireplace insert is certified?

Certified wood stoves and fireplace inserts are designed to emit less pollution. These devices are typically newer than mid-1990s and include a metal label on the back indicating it complies with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emission standards. Traditional, open-hearth fireplaces are not certified.

What if I rely on my wood stove because my primary electric/oil/propane heat is too expensive?

We rarely have more than one or two burn bans each winter, with each lasting only a few days to a week. On these few days, the use of your (primary) clean heating device is expected in order to keep air quality healthy for you, your family, and your neighbors. The only exception is if your wood stove is your only adequate source of heat.

What does "adequate source of heat" mean?

State law defines "adequate source of heat" as "the ability to maintain 70 degrees Fahrenheit at a point three feet above the floor in all normally inhabited areas of a dwelling" [WAC 173-433-030(1)].

But how do you know if my wood stove or pellet stove is my only adequate source of heat?

The resident must make this determination. If you determine that you need to use your wood stove during a burn ban to provide adequate heat, you still may **not** generate visible smoke.

What if my furnace or other home heat is not adequate?

If your primary heat source is not adequate, you may supplement that heat with your pellet or wood stove during a burn ban. However, you are still required to minimize smoke. If agency inspectors observe a burn ban violation – smoke in excess of 20 percent opacity for six consecutive minutes – they will issue a Notice of Violation to the property owner and recommend a \$1,000 penalty. Visit www.pscleanair.org/actions/woodstoves for tips on minimizing smoke.

How do I report a burn ban violation?

Violating a burn ban can result in a civil penalty starting at \$1,000 per day. To report a burn ban violation, e-mail us at inspection@psccleanair.org. Please include the street address and ZIP code of the violation.

What about manufactured logs like Duraflame or Javalogs – can I use them during a burn ban?

During an air quality burn ban, it is the use of solid-fuel burning devices that is restricted – not the type of fuel. In a Stage 1 ban, for example, you cannot use a fireplace or uncertified wood stove to burn any solid fuel, not even a manufactured log. Similarly in a Stage 2 burn ban, it's the use of any wood stove, fireplace or pellet stove that is prohibited. When a burn ban is not in effect, however, manufactured logs are a cleaner alternative to cord wood for fireplace fires. They produce approximately 70 percent less pollution than cord wood. Should you opt to burn manufactured logs, please note that many varieties are not suitable for wood stoves and fireplace inserts – check the guidelines on the wrapper to ensure compatibility with your device.

I thought pellet stoves burn much cleaner than wood stoves. Why are they included in Stage 2 burn bans?

Pellet stoves do indeed burn significantly cleaner than wood stoves, and generate much less air pollution. They are not pollution-free, however. Pellets are a solid fuel, which when combusted, still generate pollution. Because pellet stoves are cleaner than fireplaces and uncertified woodstoves, they are permitted during a Stage One burn ban. No solid fuel-burning devices, however, are allowed during a Stage Two burn ban. For a bit more background on pellet stoves, you can visit www.pscleanair.org/actions/woodstoves and click on "Clean Heating Choices."

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My wood stove was fully-loaded when I found out about the burn ban. Immediately extinguishing it will waste fuel and generate even more particulate. What should I do?

You don't need to take extreme measures to put out your current fire, just don't load it back up until the burn ban is lifted. We allow a reasonable window of time for folks to safely damper down and extinguish existing fires before we begin enforcement patrols. We also provide an adequate window of time for the word to get out there. The exception to this of course is if your wood stove is your only source of adequate heat. If that is the case, however, you must ensure that your use of the device does not generate visible smoke. Generating visible smoke is prohibited during a burn ban and a sign you are not burning properly.

Can I use my barbecue grill during a burn ban? What about my chiminea?

Charcoal barbecues and other outdoor wood-burning devices such as chimineas, outdoor fireplaces, and fire bowls are considered 'recreational fire' devices. Recreational fires using solid fuel – such as charcoal or wood – are always prohibited during air-quality burn bans. Wood and charcoal fires lit in chimineas, fire pits, fire bowls and similar devices fall under this definition. Propane and natural gas grills, patio heaters and fire pits can be used during a burn ban. For more information, see the Washington Administrative Code Section 173-425-050(3a).

Are beach bonfires allowed during a burn ban?

No. Bonfires are considered recreational fires, and are prohibited during air quality burn bans. This includes bonfires or beach fires at city and state parks, such as those traditionally lit during the holiday season for the Christmas Ships.

What happens if there is a power outage during a burn ban? Can I use my wood stove then?

We recognize the importance of providing heat for your family. If your only option is a wood stove, we understand your need to use it. However, you must minimize smoke by burning properly; excess smoke is always illegal.

It's windy outside. Why is there a burn ban?

We issue burn bans on a county-wide basis. This is to help maintain healthy air throughout the entire region. Our counties, however, have very diverse landscapes. Sometimes, one part of a county may experience stagnant weather conditions and elevated pollution levels, while in another part of the county it's windy and the air is somewhat cleaner.

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