

February 25, 2008

NJDEP Cautions the Public on Use of Wood Burning Stoves

Wood burning stoves seem as pure as mom and apple pie. As fuel oil prices continue to soar, many homeowners believe they are an economical, healthy, and environmentally correct energy alternative.

Although wood is a renewable source of energy, wood burning results in air pollution including fine particulate matter and carbon dioxide, which contribute to global warming and cause respiratory ailments.

Therefore, homeowners using wood burning stoves and boilers as primary or supplemental energy sources may wish to reconsider their choice. The same environmental and health concerns apply to the use of fire rings or chimeneas which are used in warmer months for backyard gatherings or events.

One option is to consider upgrading your stove to a USEPA-certified woodstove or using a USEPA-certified woodstove or fireplace insert which reduces air pollution. A better option may be to replace stoves with a pellet or gas stove, which produces less than 150 times the amount of fine particles compared to a USEPA-certified wood stove. (Source: <http://www.epa.gov/woodstoves/refp.html>)

New Jersey's Clean Energy Program offers homeowners environmentally preferable renewable energy options such as solar, wind, or landfill gas to supplement their primary energy source. More information is available at <http://www.njcleanenergy.com/renewable-energy/home/home>.

However, if you do continue to burn wood, follow these tips to reduce pollution and protect your health and safety and the health and safety of those around you:

- Season wood outdoors through the hot, dry summer for at least 6 months before burning it. Properly seasoned wood is darker, has cracks in the end grain, and sounds hollow when smacked against another piece of wood.
- Never burn wet, rotted, diseased, or moldy wood or green (unseasoned) logs.
- Start fires with clean newspaper and dry kindling.
- Burn hot, bright fires. A smoldering fire is not a safe or efficient fire.
- Use smaller fires in milder weather.
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy.
- Never burn household garbage or cardboard. Plastics and the colored ink on magazines, boxes, and wrappers produce harmful chemicals when burned.
- Never burn coated, painted, pressure-treated wood, plywood, particle board, or any wood with glue on or in it. They all release toxic chemicals when burned.

* Check the local air quality at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/airmon/> prior to burning wood. If the air quality in your area is poor, consider other heating alternatives.

- Check the New Jersey Fire Service webpage at <http://www.njwildfire.org> for burning restrictions in your area.

Remember, if you must burn wood, burn smartly by following the tips above. These tips and other information on wood burning are accessible on NJDEP's new webpage, <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/baqp/woodburning.html>.