Woodsmoke Pollution: A Growing Concern

Fireplace facts

In winter, fireplaces and wood-stoves generate 40 percent of the Bay Area's particulate air pollution. The very fine particles—invisible to the eye—are the most harmful to health because they lodge deep in the lungs.

Woodsmoke is also an important source of dioxins and other toxic compounds. Wood-smoke contributes 39 percent of dioxin air emissions in the Bay Area.

A natural gas fireplace eliminates more than 99 percent of the pollution generated by a traditional fireplace, and is six to nine times more energy-efficient!

Health problems associated with woodsmoke

Numerous scientific studies show significant correlations between exposure to woodsmoke and a wide variety of respiratory ailments, lung cancer, and even premature death. Those most at risk for health problems due to woodsmoke are small children, the elderly, and people with asthma or emphysema.

Air pollution causes water pollution!

In the Bay Area, woodsmoke can become a water pollution problem all too easily. Some of the particles and related toxics in the air fall back into the Bay and into our watersheds, where it washes into waterways. The toxic effects of this transformation of air pollution into water pollution are now documented. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently listed San Francisco Bay as impaired due to the buildup of dioxins and other contaminants in the tissues of fish.

How to reduce pollution from your existing (traditional) fireplace

Minimize use of your traditional fireplace. Save that romantic glow for special occasions!

If you do burn, follow these guidelines:

- Burn only seasoned hardwood (oak, almond, madrone, apple).
- Minimize burning of softwoods (pine, poplar, cedar, redwood).
- Never burn garbage, plastic, glossy or colored paper, or scrap wood that has been painted or stained.
- Make sure the fire is very hot and has a good air flow. Don't try to "choke it down."
- Burn manufactured ("densified") logs. Logs made of compressed sawdust are recommended for cleaner burning because they burn slowly at high temperatures, producing less smoke and emitting 50 percent less fine particulates, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

For a copy of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's Woodburning Handbook, with detailed information about how to burn safely and heat with wood, call the Regional Water Quality Control Plant, (650) 329-2598, or visit *www.sparetheair.org/wbh/wbh01.htm*