

Message from the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency

Agency bans all land-clearing burning in King, Pierce, Snohomish counties effective July 1, will reconsider residential outdoor burn bans in the fall

February 29, 2008 -- A permanent ban on land-clearing burning in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties was adopted yesterday by the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency's Board of Directors. The ban is effective July 1, 2008. The Board deferred a decision to prohibit residential yard waste burning in non-urban areas of these same counties until October of this year, pending further analysis of available alternatives.

Land clearing burning applies to fires to clear land for development, such as building a new structure or subdivision. Residential yard waste burning means outdoor burning by a property owner of leaves, clippings and yard debris from his or her own property.

Prior to this action, land clearing and residential yard waste fires were prohibited only in the urban areas of King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish Counties. In December 2007, the Clean Air Agency proposed the three-county ban on both land clearing and residential yard waste burning. The proposed effective date for banning land clearing burning was July 1, 2008 and July 1, 2010 for yard waste burning. Kitsap County was not included in the proposal because reasonable alternatives are not yet available.

The Board's decision was preceded by a public hearing, during which several people testified in favor of a total burn ban, but many owners of large properties pointed out that alternatives to burning such as curbside pick-up, chipping on-site or hauling yard debris to drop-off sites were not reasonably and economically viable. Agency staff heard this same message at a series of rural area workshops in January.

"We learned a lot from these large property owners," the agency's Compliance Director, Jim Nolan, told the Board. "They told us our alternatives to burning don't address their needs. We have more work to do."

Although the agency's Board of Directors deferred action on residential yard waste burning, they clearly stated their unanimous intent that residential yard waste burning should ultimately be banned in denser sections of rural areas.

They directed staff to come back to the October Board meeting with revised recommendations regarding restrictions on land clearing burning in Kitsap County and residential yard debris burning in all four counties which could be implemented no later than July 1, 2010. They also directed agency staff to work with county solid waste and fire officials on expanded burn ban boundary lines, development of additional alternatives to burning and enforcement mechanisms for rural areas of the agency's jurisdiction.

"This is about balancing property rights and public health," said Board Chair Paul Roberts. "This is about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- and life comes first. It's time to move forward on this issue."

By taking this action yesterday, the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency's Board of Directors closed the public comment period on its current proposal. Public comment will be sought if another rule is proposed.

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The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency is an air quality management agency serving King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Created as a result of the 1967 Washington Clean Air Act, the agency protects public health and improves air quality by adopting and enforcing air quality regulations, educating individuals and businesses about clean-air choices and sponsoring voluntary initiatives to improve air quality.

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The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency offers e-mail notifications for several interest areas: Clean Air Action Network (burn bans, Smog Watches); monthly newsletter; burn bans; regulation updates; permit actions; and the Diesel Solutions program. You can read about each interest area at <http://www.pscleanair.org/news/agencynews.aspx>.

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