



Comments on Multnomah County Proposed Wood Smoke Ordinance

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports Multnomah County's proposed wood smoke ordinance.

The health impacts of burning wood are serious. Fireplaces and inefficient, outdated wood stoves emit soot, carbon monoxide and air toxics that contribute to asthma and other respiratory problems as well as cancer, heart disease and premature death. The proposed ordinance will help save lives and prevent illness. It will help keep kids who suffer asthma attacks in school and workers on the job.

OEC has a history of working to protect Oregonians' health from wood smoke, extending as far back as 1983, when we successfully advocated for the nation's first wood stove emissions standards. Recently, we served on the Washington County Wood Smoke Advisory Team and on a wood smoke work group convened by Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. We've examined the health concerns of wood smoke pollution, the economic needs of communities particularly affected by wood smoke pollution, cultural values around fireplaces and wood stoves, and solutions to wood smoke pollution.

We've found examples of great local efforts to address wood smoke all around the state—from Klamath Falls to Oakridge, from Pendleton to Washington County. As one example, before starting a wood stove replacement program in 2000, the City of Pendleton surveyed its residents and found that there were about 800 uncertified wood stoves in the city and that a third of the survey respondents had experienced health problems due to air pollution. Federal grants allowed Pendleton to work with residents to provide interest-free loans to replace 186 wood stoves with new EPA-certified heating systems. Pendleton also started a 7th grade Air Quality Education program at Sunridge Middle School in 2000, and that program is still running strong. Pendleton's residents are breathing purer air, and the city is meeting federal standards for particulate pollution.

Another example is Washington County's local wood smoke ordinance—a simple system to alert residents about air quality and advise them not to burn when air quality is unhealthy. Multnomah County is considering a similar ordinance, which we wholeheartedly support.

A combination of education, incentives, and policy solutions is needed to clean our air and improve the health of Oregonians in large and small communities all across the state. OEC will continue to advocate for responsible wood smoke ordinances as well as state funding for community-based education/outreach programs and funding to help households replace their wood stoves with better alternatives, especially low-income households.

We thank Multnomah County for taking on this important issue and look forward to sharing information about the new ordinance with our members.