



South Coast Air Quality Management District

21865 Copley Drive, Diamond Bar, CA 91765-4178
(909) 396-2000 • www.aqmd.gov

NEWS

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Southern California's Unusually Dry Winter Brought Record Number of No-Burn Days

Due to this winter's lack of rain and warm weather conditions, the region had 33 no-burn days, the highest since the 2014-2015 winter season when 25 no-burn alerts were issued.

"This year, persistent high-pressure weather systems trapped harmful particulate matter near the surface, contributing to unhealthy air quality levels," said Wayne Nastri, SCAQMD's executive officer.

"Fortunately, many Southland residents helped keep particulate pollution at bay by not burning wood in their fireplaces and backyard fire pits during No-Burn days," Nastri said.

Sign-ups for AirAlerts notifications, the SCAQMD's principle tool for alerting the public about No-Burn days, saw record increases this season, as residents took a more active role in helping to reduce particulate pollution in their communities.

This list shows the significant variations over the past five Check Before You Burn seasons due to varying weather patterns each year:

- 2012-2013 – 5 days¹
- 2013-2014 – 16 days
- 2014-2015 – 25 days
- 2015-2016 – 14 days
- 2016-2017 – 8 days
- 2017-2018 – 33 days

¹ For the 2013-2014 wood-burning season, the threshold for forecasting a no-burn day was lowered from 35 micrograms per cubic meter (ug/m³) of PM_{2.5} to 30 ug/m³). Therefore, if today's threshold had been in effect in 2012-2013, there would likely have been more no-burn days forecast.

Wet winters typically result in cleaner air quality for PM_{2.5} (fine particulate matter) because the storms create unsettled conditions in the atmosphere preventing the buildup of pollutants.

This winter, less than favorable weather patterns occurred for extended periods, including unusually powerful and long-lasting Santa Ana winds that exacerbated the series of wildfires that burned for several days in December. Out of the 29 wildfires across Southern California in December, six were very large fires, including the Thomas Fire which became the largest wildfire in modern California history.

Smoke from the long-lasting wildfires added more particulate matter to the air and resulted in unhealthy air quality across the Los Angeles Air Basin.

Under the Check Before You Burn program, SCAQMD meteorologists issue a 24-hour no-burn alert for residential fireplaces and outdoor fire pits when stagnant weather is predicted to raise PM_{2.5} to the upper Moderate range or higher on the Air Quality Index. The Check Before You Burn season runs every year from November 1 through the last day of February.

Residents can sign up for email or text notifications of No-Burn days at www.AirAlerts.org.

Ongoing emission controls such as no-burn day restrictions, replacement of wood-burning fireplaces with natural gas logs, and fireplace limitations for new homes all help to improve wintertime air quality.

PM_{2.5} are particles less than or equal to 2.5 micrometers in diameter -- a fraction of the width of a human hair -- are so small that they can get deep into the lungs, cause throat and eye irritation, aggravate asthma and trigger other respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. Breathing high levels of PM_{2.5} over long periods of time can also cause more serious health problems.

Although some might consider wood smoke “natural,” smoke caused by burning wood in fireplaces can emit more than five tons of harmful PM_{2.5} emissions per day in the South Coast Air Basin – more than three times the amount of PM_{2.5} emitted from all of the power plants in the Southland.

SCAQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.