

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Cowichan residents urged to keep the valley healthy by not burning yard waste

DUNCAN, BC – The Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) is encouraging residents to avoid open burning on their properties and embrace alternative ways to dispose of yard waste in support of health for Cowichan Valley residents.

“With the increased frequency that residents are exposed to wildfire smoke during the summers, it is extra important that we do what we can to reduce the exposure to smoke pollution in the winter,” said Aaron Stone, Chair of the Cowichan Valley Regional District. “We know that wood smoke has negative health impacts and we want to encourage residents to use alternatives to open burning”.

Air is a precious resource that we often take for granted. Adults take about 20,000 breaths per day and children breathe almost twice as much as an adult. During the fall and winter, the air quality in the Cowichan Valley deteriorates with the increased use of woodstoves and smoke from outdoor burning. While woodstove use and backyard burns are common in other areas, in the Cowichan Valley we have to work extra hard to reduce smoke pollution as the valley topography and unique winter weather conditions often traps smoke here.

In the Cowichan Valley, the air contaminant of greatest concern is PM2.5, which refers to particulate matter that is less than 2.5 microns in diameter. PM2.5 is released to the air when woody debris is burned. PM2.5 is linked to lung and heart diseases including asthma and heart attacks.

“The Cowichan Valley Region has higher rates of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and asthma compared to the rest of Vancouver Island and compared to the BC overall, this makes us more vulnerable as a community to the effects of outdoor burning and woodstove smoke. Every bit can we do to reduce PM2.5 in our community can help to contribute to improved health overall” said Dr. Shannon Waters, local Medical Health Officer with Island Health.

In addition to chipping woody debris, residents can drop off yard waste free of charge at CVRD recycling centres. Residents may also want to try ‘leaving the leaves’ on the ground or in garden beds, as leaves provides a place for pollinators and other beneficial garden bugs to overwinter in.

For those few residents unable to avoid burning, it’s critical to check the venting index prior to lighting up. The BC Venting Index is a scientific measure of atmospheric turbulence and winds. When the venting index is rated as ‘poor’ or ‘fair,’ it indicates stagnant atmospheric conditions and smoke from backyard burns and woodstoves will not disperse. Instead, it will remain close to the ground, negatively impacting the health of the people that live there.

Burning when the BC Southern Vancouver Island Venting Index is rated ‘Good’ is a condition of the CVRD’s Smoke Control Regulation Bylaw. Under this bylaw,

- burning in the CVRD's nine electoral areas is only permitted from October 15 to November 15 and March 15 to April 15.
- Only untreated natural wood prunings and branches can be burned. Leaves and green debris is not permitted as it creates too much smoke.
- Burn piles may not be larger than two metres square and must be located at least 10 metres from all property lines.
- Burning can only occur between 7 a.m. and sunset of the same day.

Because of the Cowichan Valley's unique topography and weather patterns, residents should be aware that the venting index is rarely rated 'Good' in the fall and winter. It is therefore best to make alternative plans to burning wood debris.

The CVRD has a wealth of material related to regional air quality on its website, including the daily Southern Island Venting Index and a real-time air quality map of the Cowichan region. To learn more visit www.cvrld.bc.ca/cleartheair. To report an illegal burn, contact CVRD bylaw enforcement at email enforcement@cvrd.bc.ca or phone 250.746.2655.

The City of Duncan, Town of Ladysmith and Town of Lake Cowichan do not permit open burning at any time of year, and the Municipality of North Cowichan has its own burn restrictions. Residents who live in CVRD member municipalities are encouraged to contact their municipality for more information.

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