



Ohio Environmental Council

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[ UNLEASHING THE POWER OF GREEN ]

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## Outdoor wood-fired boilers foul air, threaten Ohioans' health

### Environmental and health groups call for oversight of wood burners

Columbus, OH – Outdoor wood-fired boilers are growing in popularity across Ohio, especially during the winter months. But while these outdoor furnaces reduce heating costs, they can take a toll on air quality and people's health.

The Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) and American Lung Association in Ohio are calling on the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to establish standards to control dangerous air emissions from wood-fired boilers to protect Ohioans' health.

An outdoor wood-fired boiler is a water heater (a "fire box") fueled by wood that is located outdoors and is separated from the space being heated. The fire produced in the fire box heats water that is circulated through a house by underground pipes. The heat can warm houses, shops, tap water, greenhouses, swimming pools, and spas.

"Outdoor wood-fired boilers are like having a diesel truck idling next to your house, pelting your windows with soot and ash" states David R. Celebrezze, Director of Air & Water Special Projects at the OEC. "The Ohio EPA needs to step up to the plate and protect our air quality and public health."

These unregulated sources of pollution are impacting local citizens' health. Joann Sagal, of Parkman, reports having to transport herself to the Cleveland Clinic for breathing trouble, which she attributes to pollution from a neighbor's wood-fired boiler. Both Mrs. Sagal and her husband—a WWII veteran of Pearl Harbor—report continued trouble breathing.

"We thought we would be able to enjoy retirement and spend time with our grandchildren. Instead I have to spend time in the Cleveland Clinic Emergency Room for trouble breathing," states Mrs. Sagal. She said she and her husband are experiencing abdominal pain and nausea, headaches, and regularly having burning, irritated eyes. The wood-fired boiler is located near her property line with the smoke stack at the same level as her first floor.

The pollution from the outdoor wood fired boilers permeates the Sagal's house and makes wearing particulate respirators (face mask) a part of everyday life.

“Wood-fired boilers aren't just a nuisance. The smoke from them can be dangerous to people's lungs, especially those with lung disease, diabetes, heart problems, children and the elderly,” said Shelly Kiser, Director of Advocacy at the American Lung Association in Ohio. “People trying to save money on heating bills shouldn't do so in a way that harms the young, elderly, and sick.”

Local authorities are aware of the situation, but have no laws in place regarding outdoor wood-fired boilers. Some local jurisdictions such as Garrettsville, Fairfield, Orrville Springdale, and Warsaw, Ohio, have banned these boilers but most local governments apparently have no laws on the books. The Sagals have appealed to their state lawmakers for help.

One outdoor wood-fired boiler can emit as much soot, or fine particle pollution, as:

- 2 heavy-duty diesel trucks
- 22 EPA-certified indoor wood stoves
- 45 passenger cars
- 205 oil furnaces
- 8,000 natural gas furnaces

Source: New York State Attorney General's Environmental Protection Bureau  
Department of Ecology State of Washington

Medical researchers have linked exposure to fine particle pollution to:

- asthma attacks
- painful breathing
- heart and lung disease
- early death

To avoid a patchwork of regulations, the OEC and the American Lung Association are calling on the Ohio EPA to adopt uniform, statewide protections to:

\*Require any stack on an outdoor wood-fired boilers to be at least 5 feet above any structure within 150 feet.

\*Ensure installation of a wood-fired boiler be at least 200 feet from adjoining property lines.

\*Prohibit operation of a wood-fired boiler between April 15 and September 13.

\*Ensure that wood-fired boilers may burn only wood that has no paint, stains, or other type of coatings, and/or no wood that has been treated.

\*Ensure operation of a wood-fired boiler does not cause a nuisance to surrounding neighbors.

\*Apply to all wood-fired boilers, both future installations as well as boilers currently in operation.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio's leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio's families and communities. For more information, visit [www.theOEC.org](http://www.theOEC.org).