

Seeing Through the Smoke: Understanding The Role of Public Health in Improving Air Quality

AUTHOR(S): Matthew Davis, MPH; Rachel Sakata; Ramona Quinn, REHS

Moderator: Jen Coleman

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Local Health Officials, Environmental Health Professionals, Air Quality, Community-based planning

ABSTRACT: Oregonian's love to burn wood, and for good reason. Wood remains an economical heat source in many parts of the state and it is a culturally significant reminder of our agricultural roots. Unfortunately, all that smoke can have dangerous implications for public health and the vitality of local economies across the state.

Currently, two communities in Oregon are in violation of federal health-based standards for air quality, in large part because of residential wood burning. Another five are at risk of violating those same standards. While our state environmental quality agency is responsible for monitoring our air quality, local public health agencies play a critical role in developing and implementing community-based strategies to address this issue.

This panel discussion will summarize the science behind the health impacts of wood smoke and fine particle pollution and review the regulatory framework for addressing ambient air pollution. Additionally, public health officials from two local communities in Oregon will share the challenges and success they've had while trying to reduce wood smoke pollution.

OBJECTIVE(S):

- Participants will understand the science behind the personal and public health effects of wood smoke and fine particle pollution exposure.
- Participants will understand the regulatory framework, both state and federal, that governs ambient air quality.
- Participants will learn about the challenges and successes one rural community has found while working to reduce wood smoke.
- Participants will learn about the challenges and successes one urban community has found while working to reduce wood smoke.
- Participants will understand the assets that the public health community can bring to addressing environmental quality issues.

PANEL ABSTRACT 1: Rachel Sakata is an air quality planner at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, focused on wood smoke and fine particle pollution (PM2.5). Rachel will review the science behind the health impacts of exposure to wood smoke, discuss vulnerable populations and highlight why microscopic particles can wreak such havoc on our health. Rachel will also explore the regulatory framework that governs particle pollution, take us on a virtual tour of Oregon's current compliance status and articulate the consequences that communities faces when they violate federal standards. Finally, Rachel will share a suite of legislative recommendations produced by a special wood smoke task force her agency recently convened.

PANEL ABSTRACT 2: Ramona Quinn is the Environmental Health Manager and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Klamath County Public Health. In this role she has worked with community partners to

bring Klamath Falls back into compliance with PM2.5 standards. Ramona will provide a history of Klamath Falls' air quality challenges and the recent successes they've had in slowly but surely reducing wood smoke pollution. She'll focus on the role of her local health department in developing and enforcing regulations meant to curtail wood burning when the air quality is especially poor. She'll also highlight a regional effort to replace older and more polluting wood stoves.

PANEL ABSTRACT 3: Matt Davis is the Senior Program Coordinator for Community Environmental Health Initiatives at Washington County Public Health. While Washington County is not in violation of federal air quality standards, they are dangerously close. Matt will talk about his agency's efforts address wood burning in an urban/suburban environment. He'll discuss the challenges of compelling action before a community has violated the standard. He will also share some of the innovative partnerships and strategies they're using to reduce wood smoke.

PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION:

Matthew Davis, MPH
Senior Program Coordinator
Washington County Department of Health and Human Services
Portland, OR
5038463648 | matthew_davis@co.washington.or.us

CO-PRESENTER(S):

Rachel Sakata | sakata.rachel@deq.state.or.us
Ramona Quinn | rquinn@co.klamath.or.us