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STATE OF ALASKA



Press Release

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State of Alaska Issues Health Advisory and Seeks Public Assistance to Improve Air Quality in Fairbanks North Star Borough

(JUNEAU, AK) –The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) and Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have issued air quality advisories for the past several days for North Pole, Fairbanks and surrounding areas. Air quality conditions remain VERY UNHEALTHY in North Pole and are considered UNHEALTHY in the Fairbanks area, with high levels of particulate matter (PM 2.5). These levels are more severe than those seen in recent winters in the FNSB. In addition, particulate matter will continue build up and poor air quality will persist unless emissions can be reduced or weather conditions move the pollution out of the area. The elevated amount of particulate matter is a threat to the public's health.

The Department of Health and Social Services warns that people with respiratory or heart disease, the elderly and children should avoid any outdoor activity; everyone else should avoid prolonged exertion.

Some airborne particulate matter is small enough to travel deep into the lungs. Research shows that exposure to poor air quality is associated with serious health effects, including increased risk of heart attack and stroke, asthma-like symptoms, asthma attacks, and even death. Persons at greatest risk include people with heart or lung disease and older adults. Even healthy people may have temporary symptoms such as irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat; coughing; phlegm; chest tightness; and shortness of breath. If you have respiratory or cardiovascular disease and experience any adverse health effects, consult your physician.

Given the duration of this episode and high levels of fine particulate matter, the State is encouraging residents to take immediate proactive measures to improve air quality:

- Residents with oil or natural gas/propane, that can afford to do so, should use this source and voluntarily reduce or stop supplemental wood burning while this air quality advisory is in effect.
- For those residents who use wood for heat, it is important to burn seasoned wood and practice smart burning practices. When wood is burning efficiently there should be no black smoke and little visible emissions from your stack.

- The Fairbanks North Star Borough prohibits open burning in certain areas during the period from November 1 through the end of February. For information on open burning, please contact the Borough at 459-1312.
- If you have an indoor air filter, turn it on to minimize indoor air pollutant levels as some outdoor PM2.5 can travel indoors.

“We recognize that heating costs are very high and can represent a significant portion of a household’s budget, particularly when temperatures are so low,” said Alice Edwards, DEC’s director of the Division of Air Quality. “We are requesting and appreciate Fairbanks and North Pole residents’ cooperation in helping to improve the air quality for themselves and their neighbors.”

The National Weather Service forecast and air quality forecast is for continued stagnant air conditions and poor air quality, which could continue into early next week. Note that this advisory is based in part on particulate matter readings from the downtown areas of Fairbanks and North Pole and other selected local areas, but may not be representative of air quality in all areas in the region.

Particulate Matter (PM) is a mixture of small particles and liquid droplets that is made up of a number of components such as dust, soot, and unburned fuel suspended in the air. Particulate matter is categorized by size; PM less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM2.5) is referred to as “fine” particulate matter.

For information on FNSB Air Quality, visit their website at:
<http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/airquality/>.

For information on PM2.5 issues in the Fairbanks area from the Department of Environmental Conservation, Air Quality Division, visit their website at:
http://www.dec.state.ak.us/air/anpms/comm/fbks1_pm.htm.

For information on PM2.5 health effects, visit the US Environmental Protection Agency website at: <http://www.epa.gov/pm/health.html>.

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