

Tips to make you “air aware” this fall

As we wave goodbye to summer, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) encourages families to become more air aware this fall and winter.

Awareness of air quality is especially important if you have lung disease like asthma, if you have heart disease, if you are an older adult or a child, or if you are active outdoors. Elevated levels of fine particle pollution can irritate the eyes, nose and throat and cause coughing, tightness in the chest, and shortness of breath. Even otherwise healthy individuals can experience health effects when air pollution levels increase.

Getting the information you need to protect your family from the harmful effects of air pollution is now as easy as checking your local weather forecast. With EnviroFlash, a free service provided by the MPCA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, you can receive useful air-quality information via email or text message.

It's easy to sign up for EnviroFlash. Just go to mn.enviroflash.info, click on “on-line subscription page,” fill in your email address and ZIP code, and select the type of message you want to receive. You can sign up to receive daily air quality forecasts, or choose to be notified only when the MPCA issues an air quality alert or advisory.

Being air aware also means taking actions to reduce your contribution to air pollution. Most fine-particle pollution is produced when coal, gasoline, diesel fuel, and wood are burned. By choosing these air-pollution-reduction activities, you can improve the air quality in and around your home and across your community.

Burn less gasoline:

- **Drive easy.** Improve fuel efficiency by 10% or more by following green driving tips, <http://www.greencars.org/drivingtips.htm>.
- **Drive less.** Combining trips, carpooling, and using alternative modes of transit, like walking, biking or busing, all help reduce local air pollution. For tips on how to get started, visit <http://www.pca.state.mn.us/hqzq591>.
 - World Wide Car-Free Day - Leave your car at home on Thursday, September 22! <http://www.bikewalktwincities.org/news-events/events/world-wide-car-free-day>
- **Avoid idling.** Vehicle exhaust is hazardous to health and an indication that fuel is being wasted. For most cars, turning off and restarting the vehicle uses less fuel than idling during stops longer than 30 seconds.

Use less energy at home and at work:

- **Reduce demand at home.** Most electricity in Minnesota is produced at facilities that burn coal or natural gas. By lowering your electricity demand your energy savings will also result in less air pollution. For tips on how to reduce energy use in every room of your home, visit Energy Star, <http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=popuptool.atHome>.

- **Reduce demand at work.** Use power strips to easily turn off electronics when they are not being used, activate your computer's automatic sleep settings, and switch off unnecessary lights. For more tips on how to reduce energy use in the office, visit http://www1.eere.energy.gov/femp/services/energy_aware_oec.html.

Burn cleaner:

- **Burn less.** If you do not depend on it for heat, burn less often. It's more economical and will reduce air pollution in your home and in your community. Always avoid unnecessary burning on bad-air days.
- **Only burn clean, dry, seasoned, untreated wood.** Burning other materials produces more hazardous air pollutants, and may damage your stove as well as your health.
- **Maintain your appliances.** Make sure all flues, chimneys, and exhaust vent pipes are properly connected, in good condition, and unobstructed. Have all combustion appliances cleaned and inspected once a year.
- **Convert to a cleaner-burning appliance.** All woodstoves manufactured since 1988 must be EPA-certified, which means they use one-third less wood than older stoves to produce the same amount of heat, while emitting 50 to 60% less air pollution. Natural gas fireplaces also reduce air pollution.

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