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## New Law to Affect Wood-Burning Fireplaces

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It may soon be harder to curl up in front of your beautiful wood-burning fireplace, thanks to new air-quality regulations. Starting March 9, builders of new homes and those doing home renovations will be required to use gas fireplaces or an alternative cleaner-burning wood device. An open wood-burning hearth will no longer be an option to provide a warm and cozy atmosphere because of the wood smoke emissions.

Smoke from residential fireplaces and wood-burning stoves contribute to air pollution in Southern California. The smoke contains a complex mixture of gases and tiny particles that are so small that the body's natural defense mechanisms can't prevent them from entering deep into the lungs. When this happens, the particles can reduce the function of the lungs and trigger asthma and heart attacks. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), this smoke causes burning eyes, coughing, running noses and bronchitis and agitates existing health condition. The most susceptible and affected are children, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses.

As a result, many state and local air agencies are working to reduce the amount of emissions caused by wood-burning smoke. The American Lung Association of California has been working with the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) to bring awareness to the harmful health risks and to reduce wood-smoke emissions. On March 8,

2008 Rule 445 was passed by AQMD in order to reduce the emissions of wood-burning fireplaces and stoves.

A summary of the new rule includes that no permanent indoor or outdoor wood-burning fireplaces can be installed in new developments after March 9, 2009. The rule is applicable to all landowners and sellers of wood-burning devices and firewood.

Exceptions to the rule are made for new construction that does not have a natural-gas service within 150 feet within the property. It does not apply to cook stoves, low-income housing, and properties where firewood is the sole source of heat. Also exempt are properties that are sold or transferred and have permanent wood-burning fireplaces. The rule is also not applicable to properties above 3,000 feet in elevation and historical sites. Residents in the Highlands can't even slip by this one.

For the most part, the rule does not affect homes that already have wood-burning fireplaces. However, the rule also states that after November 11, 2011 these homes may be subject to mandatory curtailment of wood burning in their homes; possibly 10-25 days during the winter months. Realistically, it is unlikely that there will be fireplace inspectors knocking on your door as there are only a handful of them available to cover all of Southern California.

Homeowners looking to upgrade or redesign their fireplaces will be able to purchase and install only those that are cleaner-burning wood devices,

including EPA Phase II-certified fireplace insert or stove, pellet-fueled wood-burning heater, masonry heater or a gas-fueled fireplace.

Wood smoke is wasted fuel and sticks to your chimney. Creosote, which is formed when wood is not fully burned, penetrates in the surface of the chimney lining and causes a strong acid odor. In addition, it is extremely flammable and can lead to a chimney fire. Thus the importance of having your chimney professionally cleaned each year.

Other chemicals are also formed when wood is not burned fully. One of these is carbon monoxide (CO), which reduces your blood's ability to carry oxygen. Another issue with chimneys is smoke spillage that can be caused by faulty venting or improper operation.

Fortunately, there are incentives and alternative choices available for homeowners and builders.

- The AQMD is offering monetary incentives to those who voluntarily switch to one of the cleaner devices. An EPA-certified wood stove burns wood more efficiently (saving money on your energy bill) and reduces the smoke going up the chimney by 60 to 80 percent. Many of these stoves produce almost no smoke, minimal ash, and require less firewood. They come in all different sizes and can be outfitted to heat a small room to a full-sized home.

- Pellet stoves burn a renewable fuel made of ground dried wood and other biomass wastes compressed into pellets. Most pellet stoves need electricity to

operate and can be easily ventilated through a wall. They offer some of the cleanest heating devices today.

- Fireplace inserts can be placed inside the firebox masonry with your choice of wood, pellets or gas and can equal many of the EPA-approved devices in efficiency and safety. Inserts are the same as a wood stove but are built to fit inside your fireplace.

- If you use your fireplace only for esthetic reasons, you may want to consider adding gas logs that have swirling flames and offer a sense of realism without the emissions.

- Masonry heaters are wood-burning and look like a fireplace but work differently. They store heat from a small but hot fire and then slowly release it throughout the home, while producing far less smoke.

Open fireplaces, though esthetically pleasing, are usually inefficient, can be risky and may produce harmful emissions that cause health issues. Gas models have a spectrum of heating capacities and can offer an array of pleasing designs to fit any décor or atmosphere. The fireplaces and wood stoves of today can burn natural gas, pellets and propane while providing a clean and safe way to provide heat and enjoyment.

Let's hope the next winter in Pacific Palisades is warmer than this year. Otherwise we'll all be huddled around the fireplace at the Beech Street Café.

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