

Increasing concern about illegal burning may bring restrictions

Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality have had many complaints about air quality in the downtown area of Vernonia, because of dense or noxious smoke caused by burning. Upon investigation, three Vernonia businesses were found in noncompliance with legal burning practices, according to VRFPD Fire Chief Paul Epler. Owners of the three businesses have been warned, but cita-

tions will be issued if they repeat the offense, he added.

"Recent weather patterns have also contributed to the problem," Epler said, "with cold air at ground level and warm air above it, creating an air inversion which keeps the smoke from rising."

Domestic Burn Permits in the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District allow backyard burning of yard debris and household paper and cardboard materials. It is not allow-

able at any time to burn household waste such as food scraps, plastic, aluminum or steel cans, styrofoam, furniture, clothing, and petroleum products.

Even with a permit, a backyard burn can become illegal when it emits dense smoke or noxious odors which create a health hazard. Back yard burning is not intended as a replacement for having garbage picked up, Epler explained.

Burning of commercial or industrial waste - including cardboard, packaging materials, slash piles, and scraps from home building or remodeling - is not allowed under a backyard burning permit. People who are growing a commercial crop such as hay, wheat and trees, must have a land clearing and field-burning permit to burn any of the waste. Permits to conduct a commercial or industrial burn are good for only 10 days and may be issued only under conditions approved by the Oregon Department of Forestry and/or DEQ.

At this time, residents of the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District have up to nine months a year when they may burn

with permits. If there are too many complaints about degradation of air quality because of failure to comply with local regulations, the DEQ has the authority to assume responsibility. If that occurs, VRFPD residents will likely fall under the same limited burning regulations as most of Washington

County. That can be prevented by burning dry fuels on days that allow smoke to dissipate without bothering others.

For a backyard burn permit or for further information, call Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District office at 503-429-8252, weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.



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- Make sure space heaters, fireplaces and wood stoves are in good working condition. Clean chimneys at least once a year.
- Never use fuel burning units without proper venting to the outside, as deadly fumes are produced by burning kerosene, propane and coal.
- Never close the damper with hot coals in the fireplace or stove.
- Always use a screen in front of the fireplace.
- Always use the proper fuel for each type of heater. Using non-approved fuels can be extremely dangerous.
- Never attempt to accelerate a fire with kerosene or gasoline. Both can "flash back" to the container with serious consequences. Store these fuels outside of the home.
- Maintain adequate clearance around all heating devices to ensure they are clear of combustible materials.
- Make sure house wiring is adequate and do not overload circuits when using electric heaters.
- Never use an electric space heater in the bathroom and never touch one when your body is wet.
- Keep young children away from space heaters and other sources of ignition.
- Never dispose of Christmas trees by burning them in the fireplace. Avoid creating roaring fires that can ignite soot in the chimney.

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