FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 5, 2020
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Enhanced Forecasting and Compliance Efforts Improved Check Before You Burn Program this Winter

DIAMOND BAR— Due to drier weather conditions this winter, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) issued 23 No-burn days across the South Coast Basin during the eighth annual Check Before You Burn program. This was an increase from last year's 13 No-burn days, when heavy rains prevailed.

Every winter from November 1 to the last day in February, when levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) are forecast to be high, South Coast AQMD meteorologists issue a 24-hour ban on burning wood or manufactured fire logs for residential fireplaces and outdoor fire pits.

"Smoke from burning wood in fireplaces across Southern California can emit more than four times the amount of PM2.5 emitted from the tailpipes of all vehicles in the Southland", said Wayne Nastri, South Coast AQMD's Executive Officer. "Residents play a very important role in improving wintertime air quality by avoiding wood burning on No-burn days."

For this year's Check Before You Burn season, South Coast AQMD's meteorology team rolled out an improved forecast model that predicted wood smoke particulate concentrations for several days in advance. The model combines a wood smoke tracer, forecasted weather data, and date information such as holidays and burning patterns for specific days of the week. This increased the accuracy of wood smoke predictions, PM2.5 forecasts and predictions of No-burn days throughout the season.

Also this season, enforcement activity was enhanced to further local residents' awareness of, and compliance with the program. On each No-burn day, an after-hours No-burn patrol consisting of South Coast AQMD air quality inspectors were dispatched to each of the four counties of the

agency's jurisdiction. On those days, 128 complaints were received and investigated about unauthorized burning. 47 informational letters explaining the program were distributed, and 22 violation notices were issued to those found or suspected of burning on No-burn days.

To notify the public when a No-burn day was called, advisories were sent via the South Coast AQMD's social media channels, distributed to local media outlets, posted to the agency's website, and emailed to subscribers who signed up to be notified of No-burn days. Residents can sign up for email or text notifications of No-burn days at www.AirAlerts.org.

Although some might consider wood smoke "natural," smoke caused by burning wood in fireplaces can emit more than five tons of harmful PM2.5 emissions per day in the South Coast Air Basin. Reducing wood burning on No-burn days is critical as we work toward meeting federal PM2.5 clean air standards.

Breathing high levels of PM2.5 can cause throat and eye irritation, aggravate asthma and trigger other respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. Breathing this pollution over longer periods of time can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke and can lead to low birth weights in newborns.

About Check Before You Burn

Check Before You Burn is South Coast AQMD's late fall and early winter program that became mandatory on Nov. 1, 2011, under the provisions of South Coast AQMD's Rule 445 – Wood-Burning Devices. The campaign seeks to educate residents of the South Coast Air Basin about the hazards of wood smoke and prohibits burning of firewood in a fireplace, stove or outdoor fire pit on No-burn days, when unhealthy air quality is forecast. While air quality has improved dramatically in recent decades, Southern California still has some of the worst air pollution in the nation.

South Coast AQMD is the air pollution control agency for Orange County and major portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, including the Coachella Valley. For news, air quality alerts, event updates and more, please visit us at www.aqmd.gov, download our award-winning app, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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