

ADHOC Recreational Fire Committee

**FINDINGS &  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
PRESENTED TO  
OGUNQUIT SELECT BOARD**

April 17, 2012

# MAJOR FINDINGS:

**The science on wood smoke is clear: There is no safe level of wood smoke. It is a well-documented public health hazard. - U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the American Lung Association, and many others.**

- The components of wood smoke are strikingly similar to cigarette smoke. They include carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, sulfur dioxide, plus irritant gases like nitrogen oxide that can scar the lungs, and chemicals known or suspected to be carcinogens, such as PAHs and dioxin. - *Minnesota Department of Health*
- The particulate matter (PM), in parts per million, of wood smoke is extremely small (less than 2.5 microns), and therefore, not filtered out by the nose or upper respiratory system. This PM ends up deep in the lungs, causing structural damage and chemical changes. *New Hampshire Dept. of Environmental Services*

## MAJOR FINDINGS (CONT.)

- Fine particles can trigger respiratory problems such as asthma attacks and even heart problems. Fine particles are considered especially dangerous for young children with developing lungs, the elderly, and people of all ages who have asthma, bronchitis, other respiratory problems, and cardiovascular disease. - *Minnesota Department of Health*
- Wood smoke can cause coughs, headaches, and eye and throat irritation in otherwise healthy people. – *American Lung Association & EPA*
- The chemical makeup and total amounts of these pollutants depend on how the wood is burned. Conditions that burn wood most completely produce the most usable energy and less of these harmful chemicals. In general, more energy efficient wood burning appliances produce less of these hazardous chemicals. – *Minnesota Pollution Control Agency*
- The higher the particle pollution level in neighborhoods and cities, the higher the premature death rates in the general population. In a study of 5 major American cities during a 3-month experimental ban on wood burning, they found that hospital death rates from respiratory disease and heart attacks went down dramatically. - *Harvard School of Public Health*

# MAJOR FINDINGS (CONT.)

This is just the beginning of the awareness of wood smoke as a public health issue.

- Some communities across the country have banned recreational wood fires, including 22 Massachusetts cities and towns from Boston to Belmont to Lawrence and Newton.
- Ogunquit, therefore, is in the forefront of this issue in Maine.

# MAJOR FINDINGS (CONT.)

## **State and local laws exist governing wood smoke from recreational fires**

- The state of Maine allows the use of outdoor grills and fireplaces for recreational purposes if no nuisance is created. “Nuisance” is defined as “preventing the enjoyment of one’s property”. - *Maine Statute, Title 12, Section 9325*
- Wood smoke issues fall under the definition of nuisance in Ogunquit, as well. Our ordinance further states that “ no person shall build or attempt to build a fire, except at such areas and under such regulations as may be designated by the board of selectmen, pursuant to local and state fire laws and ordinances.” - *Ogunquit Ordinance 206.2*
- In Ogunquit, a nuisance complaint about wood smoke would be investigated by the Fire Department.
- The Maine Legislature is to reconsider LD547 to study “the current laws relating to the control of wood smoke and enforcement procedures to determine if they are sufficient to protect the public.” This act was previously vetoed by the Governor.
- The State of Maine, allows brush burning with a permit. In Ogunquit, brush burning is limited to the State’s Predicted Fire Danger & Class Day for Zone 1 + 2 and only with a permit from the fire department.

# RECOMMENDATION:

Increase awareness and enforcement of current laws and ordinances to help clear the air of recreational wood smoke pollution to protect the health of Ogunquit residents and visitors.

- Clean air is essential for health and for healthy communities.
- Any new town ordinance or warrant is not recommended at this time.

# ACTION ITEMS:

- Rely, first and foremost, on the personal responsibility of this caring community to respect ones' neighbors.
- Educate the community on the *health effects* of wood smoke, how to safely make an outdoor fire, and the *process* for reporting a wood smoke nuisance.
- Reconvene this ad hoc committee periodically to develop educational materials and outreach, track the progress of LD547, and review the Ogunquit situation.

# PROCESS STEPS FOR REPORTING A WOOD SMOKE NUISANCE

## STEP 1:

First and hopefully, last, encourage dialogue with one's neighbor. Give your neighbor a chance to be a good neighbor.

## STEP 2:

Call 911 if you do not know where the smoke is coming from. Call 646-5111 (Direct) if you know the location and it is not an emergency. The Ogunquit Fire will investigate. If nuisance is deemed to exist, they will extinguish the fire and issue a warning.

## STEP 3:

A second violation can and may prompt a fine by the Ogunquit Police Department.

## STEP 4:

Ultimately, outdoor burning that causes a nuisance could lead to a civil violation that would be handled in the district court.

# EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CONTENT

Health Effects of wood smoke from recreational fires.

Wood Burning Best Practices & How to Reduce Harmful Smoke  
- *Maine Bureau of Air Quality*

- Use seasoned fire wood.
- Burn small hot fires, not large ones.
- Take wind direction and speed into account.
- Alternatives to wood fires, such as propane.

Process for Reporting a Nuisance from wood smoke.

*Educational publicity to include inexpensive flyers, WOGT-TV, local newspapers, posters.*