
Five Reasons Not to Burn Wood

Even though humans have burned wood for thousands of years, scientists have only recently discovered how hazardous wood smoke pollution is to our health—and the environment. Here are just five of the many reasons why you shouldn't burn wood:

1 | Wood Smoke is Hazardous to Health

Scientists have now linked wood smoke and the pollution it creates with a litany of health hazards.

These include asthma attacks, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, heart attacks, and stroke. Wood smoke is also carcinogenic: EPA researchers estimate the lifetime cancer risk from wood smoke to be 12 times greater than from a similar amount of cigarette smoke.

2 | Wood Smoke is Bad for the Environment

Along with driving a car, burning wood is among the most environmentally damaging activities an individual can engage in.

According to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, burned wood releases more particle pollution than the entire region's vehicles and businesses.

Wood burning is also the second largest source of dioxins in the Bay Area. These dioxins end up in the bay, ocean, creeks, and soil, where they accumulate in fish and livestock, poisoning our food supply.

3 | Wood Smoke Contributes to Global Warming

Some people choose to burn wood in the misguided belief that it is somehow “better” for the environment. But scientists have recently discovered that particles created by burning wood—so called “black carbon”—are actually a major contributor to global warming. They estimate that black carbon is the second most significant contributor to global warming.

Many experts now believe that reducing or eliminating wood and other biomass burning to be one of the easiest and most effective ways to curb global warming.

4 | Wood Smoke is Toxic

Wood smoke contains many toxic and carcinogenic substances including benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, benzopyrenes, dibenzanthracenes, and mercury.

Wood burning also creates dioxin—one of the most toxic substances on earth.

5 | Wood Smoke is Bad for Children

Children are especially vulnerable to the health effects of wood smoke.

Wood smoke interferes with normal lung development in infants and children and increases the risk of lower respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

Not only are children who are exposed to wood smoke more likely to develop asthma, but the symptoms of children who already have asthma become worse when they're exposed to wood smoke.

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