

# Health Department

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April 2nd, 2019

House Committee on Energy and the Environment  
900 Court St. NE - HR D  
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB3408 - Relating to the Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Schouten, and members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Jae Douglas, Environmental Health Services Director for the Multnomah County Health Department. I write to you today in support of HB 3408, which funds community efforts to promote economic development and improve public health by reducing wood smoke emissions. I would like to share three main points with you, so that you may feel confident in your support of moving HB3408 forward.

- 1. Wood smoke pollution is one of the largest state and local contributors to excess cancer risk from air pollution.** Like many other counties across the state, wood smoke is one of the largest contributors to wintertime particulate matter pollution in Multnomah County. Wood smoke is a complex mixture of fine particulate matter (PM), carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, nitrogen dioxide, and other harmful substances. Health risks from exposure to wood smoke include heart disease, lung disease, respiratory distress, low birth weight, and can increase cancer risk; there is a growing body of scientific literature suggests that it can be harmful even when there isn't enough to see or smell. In Multnomah County, residential wood smoke accounts for 11% of all area source air toxics excess cancer risk<sup>1</sup>. The County made a significant step in addressing wood smoke emissions in January 2018, when our Board of Commissioners passed a winter wood smoke curtailment ordinance. This new law was put in place as a low-cost, big reward action to protect our communities and address the risk that winter wood burning could move us to a status of "non-attainment" of federal air quality standards for small particulate pollution. In the first full season of the implementation of the ordinance, we documented more than four weeks of poor air quality. Although we have also been able to document early success in reducing wood burning behavior, the curtailment ordinance is only one tool of a long-term community wood smoke reduction strategy, especially when dirty

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<sup>1</sup> EPA, NATA, 2018

uncertified wood stoves are still in people's homes. The EPA recommends education campaigns and wood stove exchange programs to compliment curtailment ordinances and maximize public health benefits. These are resource intensive strategies that are out of reach for many local jurisdictions, including Multnomah County. HB3408 provides a promising financial avenue for this evidence-based work.

**2. The Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund is currently empty.**

The Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund was established by previous legislation, indicating the legislature's recognition of the importance of addressing the negative economic and public health impacts of particulate matter pollution in our communities. The goal of the fund was to reduce emissions of air contaminants by providing grants, loans or other subsidies for the replacement or removal of non-certified solid fuel burning devices. However, the fund has not been filled to date, requiring additional legislative action to replenish these important resources to local communities. We urge you to fill the fund and support sustainable funding for community-based education programs and to help households replace their wood stoves with better alternatives, especially low-income households and communities disproportionately impacted by PM concentrations.

**3. We can not choose which air to breathe and an improvement in air quality benefits everyone.** People with diseases that affect their lungs, older adults, children, and people in lower socioeconomic conditions are at greater risk from exposure to wood smoke emissions. During Multnomah County's 2018-19 wood smoke season, we saw emergency room visit numbers for asthma at or above what they were during the worst days of wildfire smoke in the summer of 2018. The Portland Air Toxics Solutions (PATS) study found that modeled residential wood smoke pollution within the Portland Metro region are generally higher in census block groups with higher proportionality of Latino households, as opposed to all other race/ethnicity demographics evaluated. However, this is not just a Portland issue. A study published just days ago (March 26th, 2019) links PM2.5 exposure to human activities responsible for PM2.5 pollution. The study found that "on average, non-Hispanic whites experience a "pollution advantage": They experience ~17% less air pollution exposure than is caused by their consumption while Blacks and Hispanics on average bear a "pollution burden" of 56% and 63% excess exposure, respectively, relative to the exposure caused by their consumption"<sup>2</sup>. These populations would benefit the most from efforts

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/13/6001>

dedicated to reducing wood smoke emissions as a result of passing HB3408.

Thank you for your consideration and support of HB3408.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jae Douglas".

Jae Douglas, PhD, MSW  
Environmental Health Services Director  
Multnomah County Health Department