



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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BURNING SEASON UNDERWAY

*County residents should consider the health of their
neighbors during fall clean-up*

LEONARDTOWN, MD (November 16, 2006) – As the final Fall clean-up of leaves and seasonal yard rakings approaches, St. Mary's County Health Department is reminding county residents of the rules that are in place with regard to open burning and the procedures homeowners must follow to ensure a safe and healthy burning season in St. Mary's County.

According to Ann Rose, environmental health supervisor at the health department, burning leaves and seasonal yard rakings this time of year does not require a permit, but that does not mean that people may burn without considering the health of their neighbors.

"We would like to have people think a little more this year about the byproducts of their burn. Noting when people are active in the area, the wind conditions, or the dryness of the material being burned, for example, all might affect the decision for a person to light the first match," explained Rose. "Using common sense when burning leaves and being polite to the people around you will prevent a lot of unnecessary air quality problems for the county."

High levels of particle pollution can affect the health of nearly every one. However certain groups, including people with heart or lung disease, older adults, and children, can also be at risk at lower levels. Particle pollution has been linked to asthma attacks, chronic bronchitis, changes in heart rate, arrhythmias and heart attacks, among other health problems.

Safeguard conditions to prevent creating a public health nuisance include observing 200' setbacks from houses, and burning under conditions that minimize smoke. In addition, residents should consider the Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). The Air Quality Index, or AQI, is a color-coded system designed to inform the public about daily air pollution levels in their communities. Air quality forecasts are available on local television stations, on state and local air quality agency web sites, on USA Today's weather page and on The Weather Channel.

"The health department is also reminding county residents to report their fires to the Emergency Operations Center located in Leonardtown. That number is 301-475-8016. This will prevent unnecessary calls to confirm that your fire is not a fire emergency," said Rose.

For more information about burning in St. Mary's County call 301-475- 4321.

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