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News from

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A.G. TARGETS AIR POLLUTION PROBLEM IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Petitions EPA to Set Standards for Smokey Outdoor Wood Boilers

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer today released a report documenting air pollution and health problems associated with outdoor wood boilers in New York State and called on the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to regulate the pollution the boilers produce. The states of Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey and Vermont and the Northeast States For Coordinated Air Use Management, an interstate association of air quality control divisions in the northeast states, also joined New York in the petition to the EPA.

Outdoor wood boilers came on the market several years ago as replacements for home oil and gas furnaces and wood stoves. They are not currently required to meet any national air pollution standards. Spitzer also wrote to four of the largest outdoor wood boiler manufacturers, inquiring about representations they make in their advertising.

“My office regularly receives calls from people living near outdoor wood boilers, complaining of severe air pollution and health problems,” said Attorney General Spitzer. “After examining the complaints, we found that there are no standards for these devices. The last thing we need is more local air pollution. Just as wood stoves must meet air pollution emission standards, so should these outdoor wood boilers.”

With summer winding down, many consumers are starting to think about how to heat their homes for the upcoming winter season. Homeowners, especially in rural communities, are increasingly turning to wood burning units installed outside the home in the hope that these devices will be more economical than oil or gas furnaces. Unfortunately, outdoor wood boilers often pollute the air to a far greater degree than either an indoor wood stove or an oil or gas furnace, and this may lead to complaints by neighbors.

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Recent research shows that under certain conditions outdoor wood boilers may be among the dirtiest and least economical methods of heating. Since the boiler's chimney is often lower than a typical house chimney, the boiler's smoke more directly reaches neighbors. The boilers function most efficiently and cleanly when they burn clean, dry wood; however, when wood treated with chemicals, or garbage and scrap are used as fuels more smoke is produced and additional toxic chemicals are released into the air. Some manufacturers advertise that the devices can burn "just about anything."

Unlike indoor wood stoves, outdoor wood boilers do not have to meet safety or performance standards. EPA has established pollution limits on wood stoves, resulting in significant reductions in air pollution from stoves manufactured since 1992. Recent tests show that outdoor boilers may release as much as 12 times the fine particle pollution released by EPA-certified wood stoves, 1,000 times more than oil furnaces and 1,800 times more than gas furnaces.

Since 1999, some 77,500 outdoor wood boilers have been sold nationwide, with 7,500 of those sales in New York. The average price of an outdoor wood boiler is \$5,500.

The pollutants emitted by outdoor boilers can cause or contribute to health problems such as asthma, heart and lung disease, cancer, eye, nose, throat and lung irritation, coughing and shortness of breath.

Peter Iwanowicz, Vice President of the American Lung Association of New York State said: "Airborne fine particles make people sick and cut short lives. Since outdoor wood boilers belch out excessive amounts of fine particles compared to other residential heating systems, federal policy makers need to step up and set stringent emissions limits to protect public health. With ninety-percent of New Yorkers already living in areas where air quality fails to meet federal health standards, we cannot afford to let these sources of pollution go unchecked."

John Spengler, Ph.D., Professor of Environmental Health at the Harvard University School of Public Health said: "I am pleased that the New York Attorney General is addressing the public health problem of outdoor wood boilers. Particulate pollution and irritating gasses from poorly controlled wood-burning sources has produced health problems that must be addressed."

The report and petition are available on the New York Attorney General's website: www.oag.state.ny.us.

The principal author of the report is Judith Schreiber, Ph.D., Chief Scientist, New York Attorney General's Environmental Protection Bureau. The EPA petition is being handled by Assistant Attorney General Eugene Kelly of the Environmental Protection Bureau, and the consumer fraud review is being handled by Assistant Attorney General Amy Schallop of the Consumer Frauds and Protection Bureau.

