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## Wood boilers fuel air quality debate

By Andrea Stone, USA TODAY

A surge in sales of outdoor wood boilers, cheaper alternatives to oil and gas home heating, has neighbors fuming over the smoke they produce and states and towns rushing to regulate them.

At least seven states and dozens of towns in the Northeast and Midwest have passed or are considering measures to ban, restrict or monitor the wood-burning devices known as OWBs.

Unlike indoor wood stoves, outdoor furnaces are not required to meet federal pollution standards. Last year, the Environmental Protection Agency issued voluntary emissions guidelines to boiler manufacturers, but they don't apply to 200,000 older devices in use.

Lisa Rector of the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management says states are putting pressure on manufacturers to reduce emissions by barring sales of devices that don't meet their standards. NESCAUM, a group of eight air quality agencies, says the smallest OWB emits 20 times more fine particles than a wood stove.

Deidre Darsa of the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association, an industry group, says wood may never burn as cleanly as natural gas or oil, but it is an important renewable fuel that can help decrease dependence on foreign oil.

Anita French, who built a boiler at her Stratham, N.H., home a year ago, says "it's a mystery" why neighbors have complained. "I look out my window and can't see anything," she says.

"I had no control over the air quality in my yard," says Beth Thomas, 45, whose family sold their house in Bowdoinham, Maine, to escape a neighbor's boiler. They moved to a town that bans boilers.

### 'SICK OF BEING SICK': Anger burns against boilers

Washington state has long had strict standards. Now the Northeast is acting:

- New York.** A 2005 report by Eliot Spitzer, then attorney general and now governor, sparked action on regulations that are expected this summer.
- New Hampshire.** Legislators held a hearing last week on proposed boiler emission standards.
- Maine.** Lawmakers halted sales of high-emissions boilers until new regulations are set.
- Vermont.** A pending bill would apply wood-stove standards to boilers.

Towns also are acting. Wellsboro, Pa., meets this month on a proposed ban. Hampden, Mass., recently required permits for OWBs.

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