

Ruling date 2-3-15

The federal Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday released long-awaited rules aimed at reducing air pollution from wood-burning heaters, including wood stoves, pellet stoves and both indoor and outdoor wood boilers.

The rules in general will require many stove makers to begin producing heaters that are less polluting beginning this year, and up to 70 percent cleaner by 2020. The new emission limits target fine particles and toxic compounds associated with smog and various health concerns.

The new standards update existing emissions levels set in 1988. Since then, new technology has made it possible to build wood heaters that are more efficient and less polluting, the agency says.

The new rules don't cover stoves or heaters already in people's homes, nor do they extend to indoor fireplaces.

The EPA rules also allow time for stores to sell stoves that meet the 1988 levels, through the end of 2015.

The wood-heating trend is good for cutting energy bills, but not for air quality. Older wood stoves, especially, churn out more of the pollution that aggravates asthma and other respiratory conditions than the oil and gas heating systems they're meant to supplement or replace.

The new rules are based on thousands of comments, a public hearing and months of input from businesses. They have been of intense interest to Nature's Comfort.

Dave Nyhof, the company's president, said Wednesday that the new rules won't have an impact right away, because all Nature's Comfort gasification stoves burn much cleaner than the 1988 standards for noncatalytic stoves of 7.5 grams per hour. But the EPA is calling for emissions to be cut to 2 grams per hour in 2020.

The trade group, the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association, had a mixed reaction. It applauded the EPA's decision to phase in standards for warm-air wood furnaces and give manufacturers time to develop and test cleaner models.

“Conversely,” the group said in a statement, “we believe the agency missed the mark in other areas. For example, some of the future standards proposed for wood-burning appliances do not meet the government’s duty to set standards based on data that shows both a tangible benefit to consumers and cost-effectiveness.”

The association added: “Our industry does not oppose new emission standards. We simply want to ensure that these future standards produce a real clean-air benefit that consumers can afford. We will continue to work with EPA and other stakeholders to address our remaining concerns.”

The new wood-burning rules were generally embraced, however, by an advocacy group in Bethesda, Maryland, that promotes cleaner-burning technologies.

“Overall, we think the EPA did a good job and released a fair rule that includes many compromises between industry and air quality agencies,” said John Ackerly, president of the Alliance for Green Heat. “We think these rules are good for consumers and will not drive prices up hardly at all, but will result in more efficient appliances that will save consumers time and money.”

Ackerly called the 2-gram-an-hour standard for stoves in 2020 “fair and reasonable,” and likely to lead to more and improved catalytic stoves.

“We think delaying the standards for warm air furnaces for one to two years was a mistake,” he said.