

Some states fight EPA to keep wood fires burning

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Smoke wafting from wood fires has long provided a familiar winter smell in many parts of the country — and, in some cases, a foggy haze that has filled people’s lungs with fine particles that can cause coughing and wheezing.

Citing health concerns, the Environmental Protection Agency now is pressing ahead with regulations to significantly limit the pollution from newly manufactured residential wood heaters. But some of the states with the most wood smoke are refusing to go along, claiming the EPA’s new rules could leave low-income residents in the cold.

Missouri and Michigan already have barred their environmental agencies from enforcing the EPA standards. Similar measures recently passed Virginia’s legislature and are pending in at least three other states, even though residents in some places say the rules don’t do enough to clear the air.

It’s been a harsh winter for many people, particularly those in regions repeatedly battered by snow. And the EPA’s new rules are stoking fears that some residents won’t be able to afford new stoves when their older models give out.

“People have been burning wood since the beginning of recorded time,” said [Phillip Todd](#), 59, who uses a wood-fired furnace to heat his home in Holts Summit. “They’re trying to regulate it out of existence, I believe, and they really have no concern about the economic consequences or the hardship it’s going to cause.”

Others contend the real hardship has fallen on neighbors forced to breathe the smoke from winter wood fires.

The EPA typically relies on states to carry out its air quality standards. But states may not be able to effectively thwart the wood-burning rules, because federal regulators could step in to do the job if local officials don’t.

“If the EPA wants to come in here and enforce it, come on in. (But) I’m not going to help them,” said Michigan state Sen. [Tom Casperson](#), whose law barring state enforcement of the EPA regulations takes effect March 31.

About 10 percent of U.S. households burn wood, and the number relying on it as their primary heating source rose by nearly a third from 2005 to 2012, the latest year for which federal figures were available.

The EPA’s new rules apply only to new wood heaters and won’t force anyone to get rid of their older models.