

New funding for the Seeley Lake wood stove replacement program to be featured at May 24th meeting.

As we begin to leave the grip of winter, and begin looking to enjoying outdoor activities like gardening, boating, biking and walking, air quality concerns gets pushed to the back of our minds. However, now is the time to begin planning for next winter, particularly in light of a new source of grant funding that has been secured by the Seeley Lake Community Foundation. To help local residents understand the opportunity, Clearwater Resource Council is sponsoring an air quality update meeting on May 24th, 6pm at the Community Hall. Presenters at this meeting include officials from Missoula County, Pyramid, and stove vendors (Axmen). In addition, a representative from the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) will be on hand to walk people through energy assistance and weatherization programs.

An Eye on the Environment article published in February outlined the progress of the Seeley Lake Community Council's Air Quality Committee (AQC). With the addition of six new air quality monitors, it has been shown that two or three areas in Seeley Lake need attention due to unacceptably high levels of particulate matter . Possibilities for solutions will be presented at the May 24th meeting.

To review, research over the past 15 years has shown that fine particles, measured as 2.5 microns or PM2.5, can affect populations that have respiratory sensitivities such as asthma, emphysema or lung infections. Hospital records validate the amounts and the consequences including increased cardio-pulmonary disease and lung cancer associated with small particulate pollution. Accumulations are measured in micrograms per cubic meter. Before 2006 the standard was 65 micrograms/cubic meter. In 2006 the level was dropped to 35. In reviewing monitor data for Seeley Lake this year, we have exceeded the limit multiple times and would be seen as out of compliance. For an example, see data for January 11 chart included here.

The next immediate step for Seeley Lake, to help alleviate the wood smoke problems, is to sign up residents in, specific locations, for a new stove. While replacing an existing wood stove is expensive and time consuming, the community has received grants to pay for some stoves and installation. So, while there are limitations to what can be accomplished the first year, we have enough money to begin the process of switching to stoves that are healthier for the resident and the community. Indoor air quality is as important as outdoor air quality. Both are improved with certified woodstoves, pellet stoves or other devices.

The Seeley Lake Community Foundation has spearheaded the process to seek grant funding for this program. The funding will be used to install about 25 stoves altogether in the next 12 months. Thanks to the new funding, there is the potential for residents to qualify for a free new woodstove and installation.

In addition, materials have been purchased for sheltering wood to keep it dry. Information on shelters will also be available at the meeting on the 24th. As is well known, dry wood burns better and pollutes less. As stated in the February article, a large armload of green wood (40% moisture) contains 2 gallons of water. That's like putting 2 gallon jugs of water into your stove; you get a lot of smoke, but little heat. Some moisture monitors were distributed at the Wood Stove Open House in October. More are now available.

One option for a stove improvement is a pellet stove. Pellet stoves are cleaner to use and to burn. With an automatic feed system and thermostat, they keep a home comfortably warm, without the constant monitoring and wood hauling of a wood stove. The pellets can be expensive, especially if you are gathering your own wood, but cost about the same as a cord of wood if you are purchasing. The ease and convenience is a big advantage, especially for those not able to haul cordwood. While pellet stoves are the best choice for reducing particulate emissions when burning wood fuel, they can be a bit more expensive to operate and an effective and reliable sourcing of pellets is still a question.

Because air quality is regulated by both the federal government and Missoula County, the community is encouraged to come together to participate in this community-sponsored program now or risk having the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) place restrictions on industry and on wood burning. Missoula County is mandated to maintain clean air for all citizens. It is the community's best interest to address this issue locally rather than risking intervention by the EPA.

Please attend the meeting on May 24th, and take advantage of the information that will be presented and learn about options and opportunities for woodstove replacement.