



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on December 23, 2012

Just Freeze! EPA Says Burning Wood Is Bad, but so Is Natural Gas, Coal, Oil

So, you're living in Fairbanks, Alaska, and it's 45 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. The high today will be -39 degrees below zero. The weather services all project lots more double-digit minus numbers in the coming days and weeks, with dips into the minus 50s and 60s. Heating oil prices are killing your family budget, so you crank up the wood stove and start burning some of the firewood you collected last summer. Uh-oh! Now you're in trouble!



Yes, you're merely trying to survive economically — along with trying to keep the wife, kids, and grandma from freezing to death. Of course, that's not a mere theoretical possibility in these temps — but federal EPA bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., have determined that fine particulate matter (soot) in your wood smoke is verboten.

Lying low in the Tanana Valley, Fairbanks regularly experiences temperature inversions that trap smoky air over the area. That means people with respiratory problems can have more irritation from increased soot content. The federal Environmental Protection Agency's revised fine particulate matter regulations (PM_{2.5}) have cut the annual level of allowable fine particulates from 15 micrograms per cubic meter of air to 12 micrograms.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough, a county area roughly the size of New Jersey with under 100,000 population, has been under the EPA gun since the agency ratcheted down its soot standards in 2008. Along with [14 other cities and 53 other counties](#) that were not then on the EPA's "non-attainment area" list, the Fairbanks North Star Borough is under orders to clean up its air or face fines and a "compliance plan" imposed by EPA. In efforts to meet the federal mandate, borough politicians attempted to regulate wood burning. That got citizens heated up.

"Everybody wants clean air," state Rep. Tammie Wilson [told](#) the Associated Press. "We just have to make sure that we can also heat our homes." Rep. Wilson sponsored a citizen initiative passed in October that bans the borough regulation of home heating devices. The borough, she said, has no business stepping in with restrictions when no one knows if they will work. "We're still waiting here for a model, a model that shows us that if we do A, B and C, we can then get into attainment," she said. "We have not seen anything from the borough, from the state or from the EPA showing us that that is even possible with the technology that is available to us."

The citizens have spoken; they have told the local, state, and federal officials that they would rather not freeze to death to satisfy federal bureaucrats who are in a fretting frenzy over theoretical deaths from soot. The citizens are on firm ground, as it turns out; the "science" the EPA has based its PM_{2.5} standards on is shoddy at best. Like the "science" cited by alarmists who are all in a twist over global warming, the studies providing the basis for PM_{2.5} are based on computer models and hidden data, not actual measurements and peer-reviewed analysis.



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Kathleen Hartnett White, distinguished senior fellow-in-residence and director of the Armstrong Center for Energy & the Environment, Texas Public Policy Foundation, is one of many experts who have caught the EPA “scientists” fudging big time. She [writes](#):

Whenever the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is confronted with evidence that its proposed regulations will kill jobs, risk blackouts, or otherwise harm economic growth, it typically seeks refuge in its own estimates of the amazing public health benefits the proposal will have.

By 2020, EPA rules “will prevent 230,000 early deaths,” one recent Administration report claims. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson has gone so far as to testify before Congress that the new regulations would provide health benefits as valuable as a cure for cancer.

“Such unequivocal declarations scare the public and can intimidate the skeptic,” says White. “If EPA claims about saving lives were true, the case for its aggressive regulatory agenda would be compelling. How can society worry about higher electric rates or losing American jobs to foreign shores, after all, when thousands of human lives are at stake?”

However, as White shows, “peeling back the layers of assumptions behind EPA’s conclusions reveal that the agency’s claims are misleading at best and deceptive at worst.”

Steve Milloy at [JunkScience.com](#) is another EPA critic who regularly exposes the agency’s exaggerated and bogus claims. In a January 6, 2012 column entitled [“EPA’s statistics not science, but nonsense.”](#) Milloy dissects the EPA’s claims concerning deaths attributable to particulate matter.

According to the EPA’s flawed methodology, dozens of U.S. cities have worse air quality than the Chinese city of Xi’an, which is notorious for having some of the worst air quality in the world. That is patent nonsense, as Milloy shows.

To cap it off, the EPA, like many of the global warming alarmists, refuses to release the data that allegedly supports its claims. That is hardly in keeping with the canons of science and the pledges of transparency from the Obama administration, note the critics.

“Directly challenging the EPA on its fine particulate matter claims has been difficult as the agency has secured the key data in the hands of private university academics, who are out of congressional and Freedom of Information Act reach,” says Milloy. “The EPA is currently stonewalling an effort by Rep. Andy Harris, Maryland Republican, of the House Science Committee, to obtain the data in question.”

The EPA’s brazen overreach and flawed science have been flayed and exposed repeatedly (see: [Here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), but the Obama administration has marched on, determined to impose its “green” agenda on the nation.

Of course, even if the people of Fairbanks were to cease all burning of firewood, there is no guarantee that they would satisfy the EPA standards. There is no viable source of energy that meets EPA approval. The EPA is down on coal and oil, and even clean natural gas, which for years was the darling energy source of the greens — until the recent natural gas boom began making it cheap and abundant.

The EPA has come under attack from many quarters for [refusing to release the data](#) underlying its claims that natural gas “fracking” methods present a danger to ground water, claims that run counter to what independent studies have shown. Like the soot rules and other EPA regulations, the proposed fracking restrictions have negative health consequences, as well as dire economic impacts.

Fortunately, American consumers and producers received some relief from the EPA’s regulatory overreach via a [ruling](#) this past August from a U.S. Court of Appeals striking down the agency’s



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proposed new limits on coal-fired power plant emissions in 28 states.

Rep. Ralph Hall (R-Texas), chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, hailed the ruling, commenting:

The EPA's arbitrary and rushed Rule threatened hundreds of good-paying jobs in my district, and would have resulted in higher costs and less reliable electricity throughout the country. It was based more on an "EPA-knows-best" approach than objective science, and was flawed by unreasonable timelines, lack of state or industry consultation, black box models, insufficient cost-benefit analysis, unverifiable health claims, and an over-reliance on computer models instead of actual pollution measurements.

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