

Oakridge, Oregon, “Ups their Game”: Earns EPA praise for cleaner air efforts

(Seattle, WA) March 6, 2018 - Following a “Moderate Non-attainment” air quality designation in 2009, the town of Oakridge, Oregon, embarked on a campaign to tackle a persistent wintertime wood smoke problem. As civic leaders and local health professionals launched a community-wide effort to change how people used their wood burning stoves, EPA worked closely with the local Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) and the State of Oregon as they put together an updated attainment plan for the area.

By 2014, while some improvement was seen, it was clear that efforts needed to be re-doubled if they were going to meet their goal. Reinvigorated community efforts featured a mandatory curtailment program, updated ordinances, an expanded field compliance program including a newly hired enforcement officer, and comprehensive compliance assistance where it was needed most.

EPA Region 10 just approved Oakridge’s updated “Moderate Area” attainment plan, which included 2014-2016 monitoring data confirming the area attained the 2006 24-hour PM_{2.5} standard. Local leaders stress they are not yet across the finish line and urge the community to keep up the great work, however, thanks to cleaner air, that line is now in sight. Currently, LRAPA is working on a maintenance plan and a request for Oakridge to be re-designated back to “attainment.”

According to EPA Regional Administrator Chris Hladick, this was a “model” effort to improve local air quality by the people who understood the problem best...because they live and breathe it.

“Oakridge offers a truly inspiring story,” says EPA’s Hladick. “Faced with a tenacious air quality challenge, local townsfolk accepted that challenge. Capitalizing on Mayor Jim Coey’s leadership, and in partnership with Lane Regional Air Protection Agency, the community ‘pulled on the rope in the same direction’ and are now breathing cleaner, healthier air. We applaud their efforts and hope they can be modeled elsewhere.”