

### **Local Air Quality Program History**

Air quality in the Lewis and Clark County Air Quality District, which includes Helena, is monitored year-round as part of the City-County Health Department air quality program.

In 1979 the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department started receiving numerous complaints from residents and physicians about the levels of wood smoke in the valley and increasing upper respiratory problems during winter months. Beginning in 1980, the Health Department located air samplers in Helena and the Helena Valley, and began a public education program on wood burning and how it affected winter air quality.

The Health Department continued to operate the air samplers and began forecasting air quality from November 1 through March 1 each year. This was the time period that was most likely to see poor air quality due to winter cold air inversions and the heavy use of wood stoves. By 2000, summer forest fire smoke had surpassed winter wood burning as a major source of poor air quality days.

In 1984, a Health Department Survey indicated that 45% of the Helena Valley population used wood burning stoves for heating. Air pollution levels continued to increase, and Helena experienced 14 consecutive poor air quality days during the 1984-1985 season. The Health Department proposed implementation of an air quality control ordinance in response. Citizen petitions were circulated and the public supported the program by 3 to 1.

With overwhelming citizen support, the Lewis and Clark County Clean Outdoor Air Ordinance was adopted January 1, 1986. The ordinance prohibited operation of any wood stove during poor air quality episodes, and limited the opacity of smoke released from wood stoves. It also limited the idling of diesel engines during poor episodes and provided for extensive public outreach and education. Finally, an enforcement provision allowed the Health Department to issue tickets for violators of the ordinance.

The current ordinance can be viewed at [http://www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Health/Air\\_Quality/Outdoor\\_Air\\_Quality\\_Ordinance.pdf](http://www.co.lewis-clark.mt.us/fileadmin/user_upload/Health/Air_Quality/Outdoor_Air_Quality_Ordinance.pdf).