

**MEDIA RELEASE**

For Immediate Release - Attention Editor

## **OPEN BURNING RESTRICTIONS ISSUED FOR ALL HIGH SMOKE SENSITIVITY ZONES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

(March 26, 2020 - Williams Lake) The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy in collaboration with provincial public health partners has issued open burning restrictions for all High Smoke Sensitivity Zones across the province until Wednesday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. No new fires may be initiated and no additional material may be added to existing fires. A map of affected areas is shown in yellow in Figure 1 and a high resolution image can be accessed on the provincial [Interactive Venting Index](#) webpage.

Real-time air quality observations and information regarding the health effects of air pollution can be found at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air>.

As cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in BC continue to increase, the BC Centre for Disease Control recommends implementing measures that help to reduce excess air pollution in populated airsheds across the province. There is strong evidence that exposure to air pollution increases susceptibility to respiratory viral infections by decreasing immune function. This means that:

- Deterioration in air quality may lead to more COVID-19 infections overall,
- Deterioration in air quality may lead to more cases of severe COVID-19 infections, adding further demand to our healthcare system, and
- Improvements to air quality may help to protect the whole population from COVID-19 and its potentially severe effects.

Evidence suggests that air pollution from combustion sources is most strongly associated with increased risk of viral infection, particularly vehicle emissions and biomass burning. At this time the BC Centre for Disease Control strongly recommends that open burning of biomass fuels be restricted in areas with high or moderate risk of population exposure to the resulting smoke. While the focus should remain on social distancing to prevent the spread of infection and reduce the number of cases, keeping our air as clean as possible will also help to protect the population during this difficult period. For this reason The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy is restricting open burning in some parts of the province. These restrictions will be evaluated on a daily basis; the area to which they apply may grow or diminish accordingly.

**Mandatory Emission Reduction Actions:**

- Pursuant to Section 29(1)(a) of the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation, the following Sections of the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation are hereby substituted:

Section 19(b)(ii): “The forecast obtained under subparagraph (i) (A) or (B) is “good” for the day the open burning starts;”

Is replaced with: “The forecast obtained under subparagraph (i) (A) or (B) is “good” for the day the open burning starts, except for areas which are High Smoke Sensitivity Zone areas identified in yellow in Figure 1, where open burning is prohibited until 9:00 AM local time Wednesday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.”

Section 20(b)(ii): “The forecast obtained under subparagraph (i) (A) or (B) is “good” for the day the open burning starts;”

Is replaced with “The forecast obtained under subparagraph (i) (A) or (B) is “good” for the day the open burning starts, except for areas identified in yellow in Figure 1, where open burning is prohibited until 9:00 AM local time Wednesday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.”

Pursuant to Section 29(1)(b) of the Open Burning Smoke Control Regulation, these substitutions are effective until 9:00 AM local time Wednesday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

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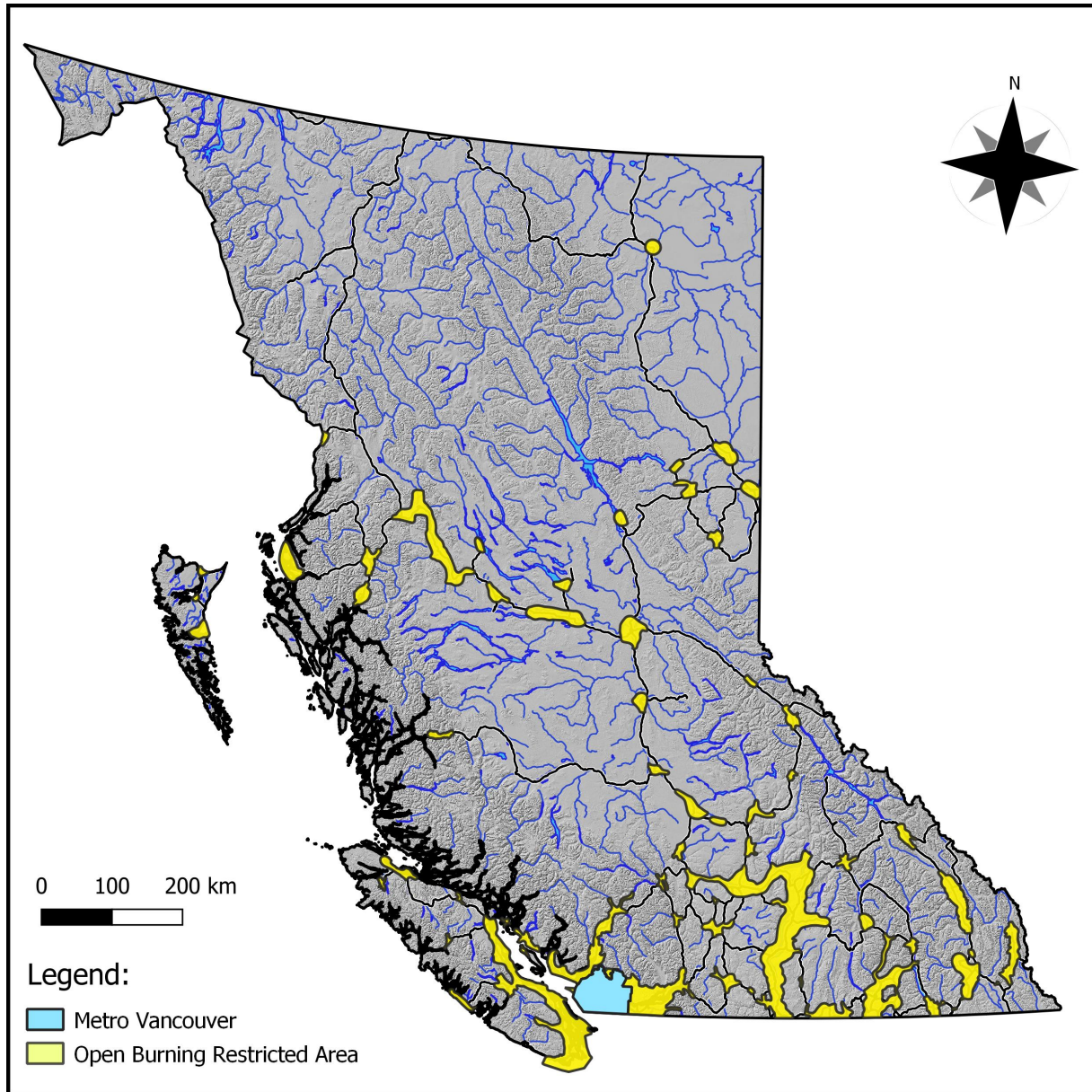


Figure 1: Location of areas where open burning restrictions are in effect. For a higher-resolution image, refer to the [Interactive Venting Index map](https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6d288bc667b24528a5c1e3b4c0373d07) at the url: <https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6d288bc667b24528a5c1e3b4c0373d07>.