



# Comox Valley Regional District Airshed Roundtable

## Roundtable Meeting #1

September 15, 2020, 1:00pm  
Zoom online platform



# Introductions

- Comox Valley Regional District
- City of Courtenay
- Village of Cumberland
- BC Ministry of Forest Lands Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development
- BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Vancouver Island University
- Chamber of Commerce
- Comox Valley Breathe Clean Air
- Comox Valley Community Health Network
- Comox Valley Nurses for Health & the Environment
- Comox Valley Farmers' Institute
- Mid Island Farmers' Institute
- Comox Valley Fireplace and Patio
- Norse Heating
- Cumberland Community Forest Society
- Elemental Energy Advisors
- Focused Energy Assessments
- Hancock Natural Resource Group
- Hearth, Patio, & Barbeque Association of Canada
- Six members of the General public from the electoral areas and the municipalities (appointed by the CVRD Board)

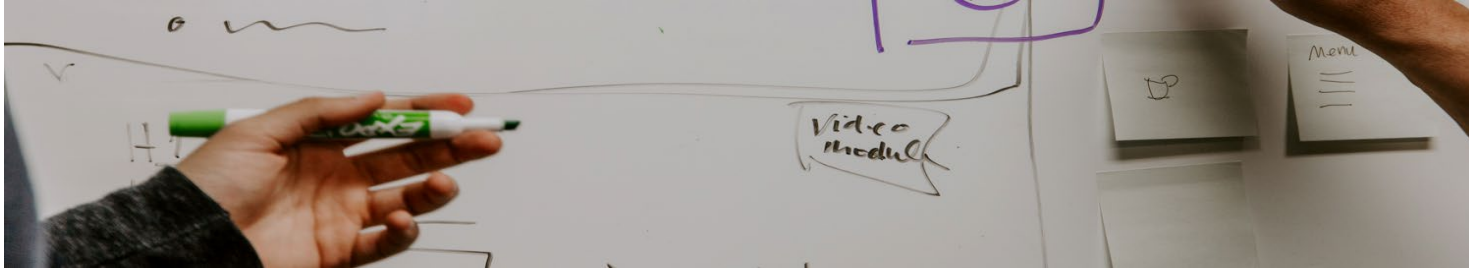


# Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions (25 min)
- Overview of Project and Process (20 min)
- Expert presentation on Air Quality in the Comox Valley (30 min)
- Break (15 min)
- Facilitated discussion on strengths, barriers, and opportunities (75 min)
- Next steps (15 min)



# Turn to a partner - Activity



- Facilitator will put you in a breakout group with 1 other person.
- In 3 minutes, briefly share:
  - What parts of the memo were most interesting to you?
  - What are your hopes for the Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable?
- Choose who will report back to larger group.



**Memo: Open burning statistics - are those a snapshot in time?**

**Memo: Solid foundation for roundtable to understand issues**

**Interested in indoor air quality information**

**Impacts of pollutants in the Valley**

**75% of people willing to switch to heat pump**

**Health outcomes communicated well**

**Need for more in depth info, and annual reports on air quality**

**Appreciate visuals, and background info**

**Sources of smoke important to include**

**Need facts to move forward with consensus**

**Concern with days with air quality warning**

**Concern with industrial forestry burning**

**How are we going to move forward regionally?**

**Hopes: Swift and meaningful action to move forward with air quality**

**Public education, breathe clean air resources**

**Educating the public on PM and air quality pollutants**

**Looking for concrete improvement in air quality**

**Clear education on the options available**

**Find points of agreement**

**How can we work together?**

**Roundtable: Educating public about industry**

**Look towards international examples: New Zealand, puget sound**

**Interested in co-benefits, ex. urban forestry purifies air**

**Operationalize solutions before the end of three years**

**Education on burning protocol needed.**

**Meaningful improvements in air quality**

**Power of education**

**Need for consistency in regulations in open burning**

**Work towards One Airshed mentality**

**People want to change!**

1. What did your partner and you find most interesting about the memo?
2. What hopes for Comox Valley Airshed Roundtable were brought forward?

# Project Overview

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Project process and role of the Airshed Roundtable

# Project Drivers

- Growing evidence demonstrates air quality in the Comox Valley is concerning due to high levels of fine particulate matter.
- Fine particulate matter affects the lungs and heart, causing health problems.
- Despite local efforts, air quality has not significantly improved.
- A fresh approach to improving air quality is needed in the Comox Valley.
- In 2019, air quality was added as a key project under the Regional Growth Strategy.



Source: Comox Valley Record



# Project Purpose

## **What are we aiming to achieve?**

- Ensure the best air possible for a healthy Comox Valley.

## **How will we achieve this?**

- Working together to navigate the complexities of air quality management through collaboration, communication and a strategic approach.
- Develop and implement a Regional Airshed Protection Strategy.





# Project Governance and Roles

## Steering Committee: *Government representation*

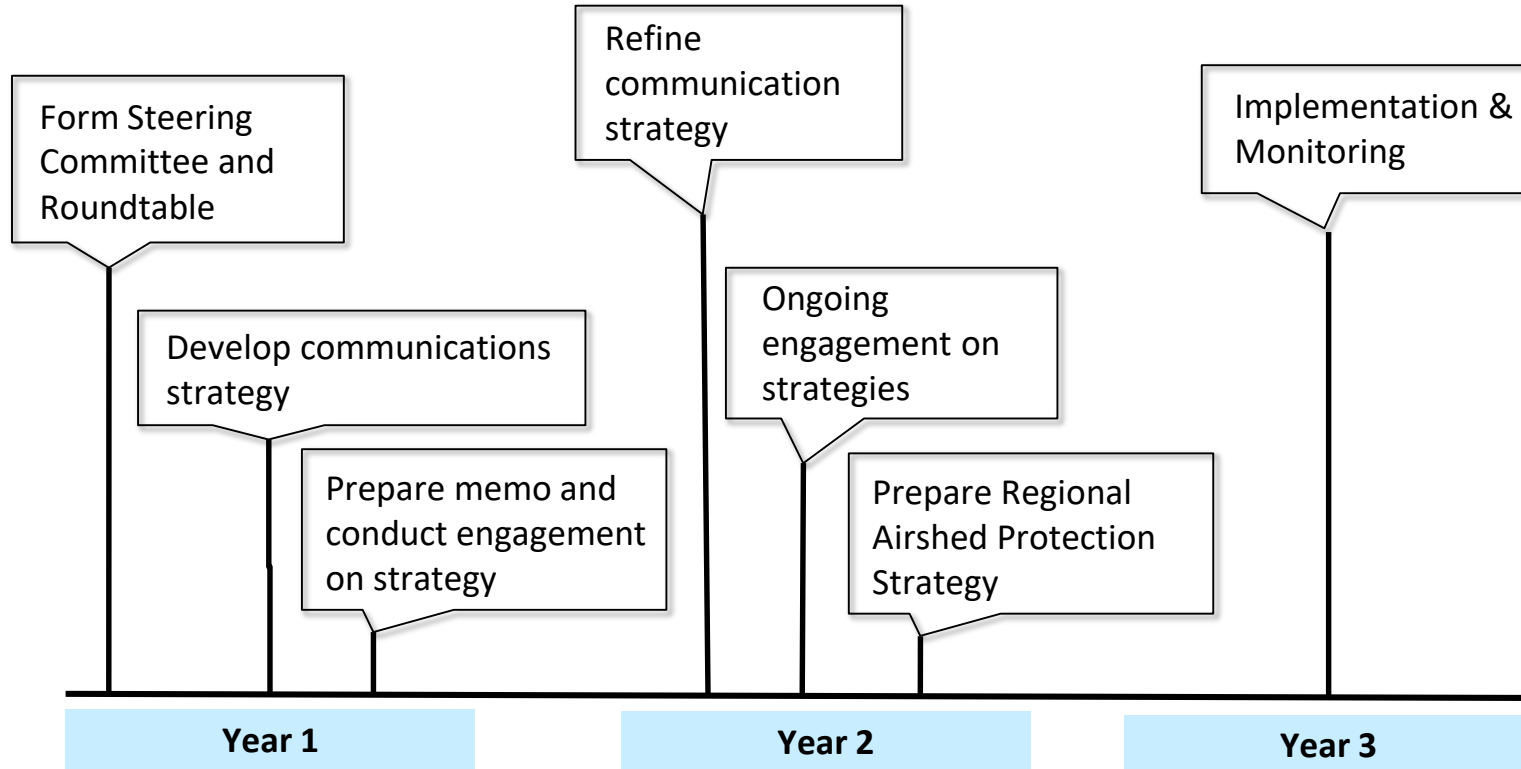
- To advance work, including setting priorities and providing direction.
- To identify gaps in knowledge, and support research and engagement to reduce those gaps.
- To support strategic planning including lending expertise.
- To act as champions for air quality management in the Comox Valley.

## Roundtable: *Community representation*

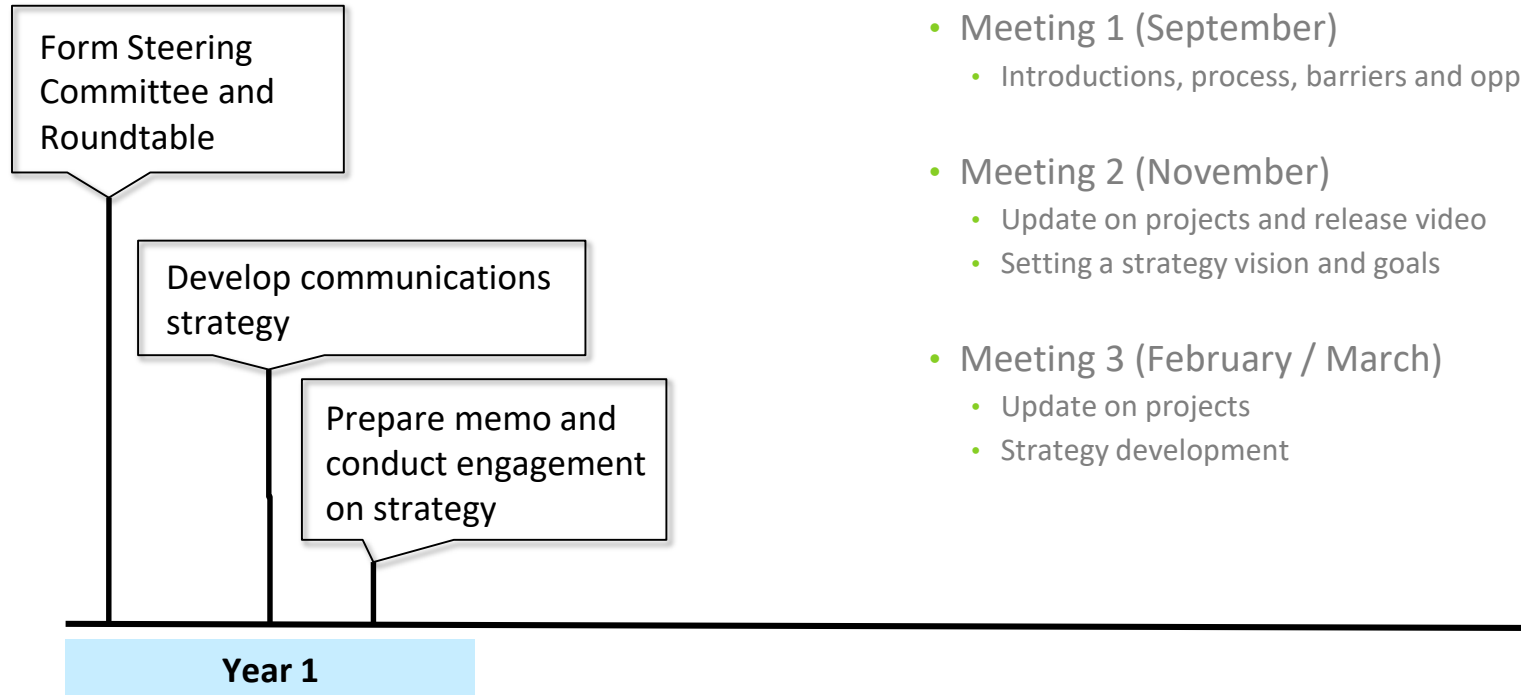
- Help establish priorities through issue identification.
- Offer potential solutions to issues identified.
- Help inform public policy on clean air in the region.
- Provide advice and support to the Steering Committee.
- Share information with the organizations / groups that they represent.



# Project Process



# Roundtable Schedule – Year 1



- Meeting 1 (September)
  - Introductions, process, barriers and opportunities
- Meeting 2 (November)
  - Update on projects and release video
  - Setting a strategy vision and goals
- Meeting 3 (February / March)
  - Update on projects
  - Strategy development





### **Process Q & A:**

Indigenous representation on the panel?

- Invited Komoks First Nation and First Nations Health Authority for Steering Committee and Roundtable
- Working together with Komoks First Nation on the Woodstove Exchange Program
- Door is open and conversations are ongoing



# Air Quality Presentation

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Tarek Ayache



### **Presentation Q and A:**

Will we be looking at the contribution of transportation of air quality in the roundtable?

- Roundtable will look at air quality holistically
- Health impacts, climate impacts, including transportation

Is there data about # of wood stove users in Cumberland vs Courtenay?

- Data is available

Is there any data tracking open burning dates in the forests south of Cumberland and overall air quality? The proximity of the burning to Cumberland is no further than Cumberland to Courtenay.

- If it is within a municipality it is not tracked - agricultural burning for example would not be tracked.
- Outside of the municipality it will be open fire tracking system, provincial database tracks open fire use.

What effect has the Wood Stove Exchange program had?

- A 5-year review study is happening this year.
- There will be more up to date information coming.
- Note that we have completed 166 wood stove exchanges since 2015

Difference between 2.5 from wet and dry wood?

- Wet wood has more 2.5 emissions

Can you comment on what sources the open burning pm2.5 #s come from? I see the worst months for these values are in February where industrial burning generally does not happen.

- Another big is residential space heating (ie. wood stoves)

Breathe Clean Air has resources to use.







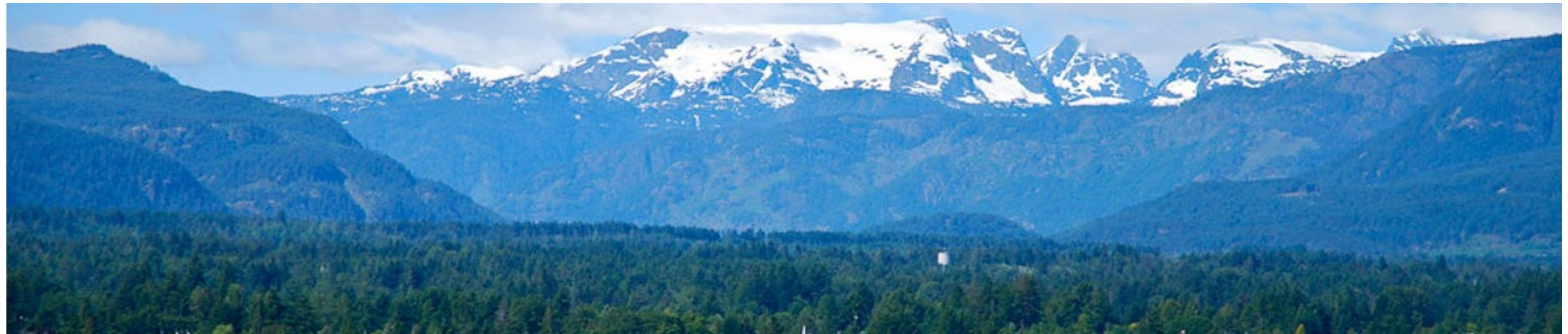


# Strengths and Barriers

- Improving regional air quality will require a locally tailored approach.
- Successful strategy will leverage regional strengths, and identify and address regional barriers.

## Strengths:

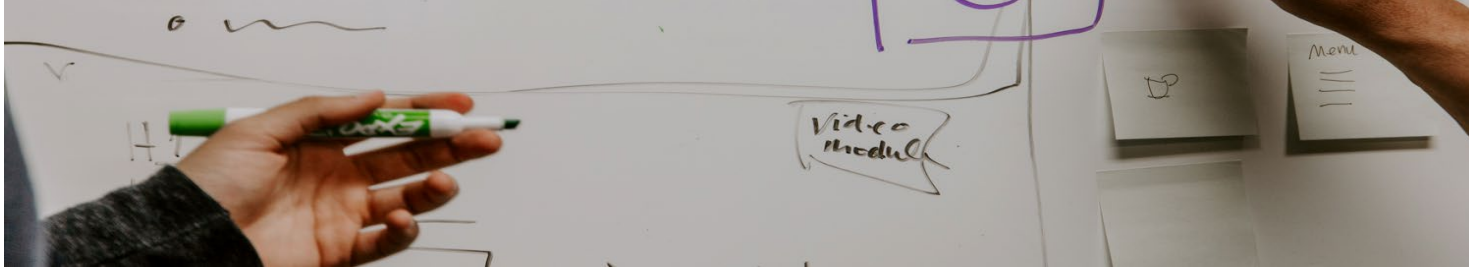
- What efforts have been made to improve regional air quality that we can build off / learn from?
- What community assets are in place that we can leverage to improve air quality?



Source: divisionsbc.ca



# Strengths - Activity



## Instructions:

- Write three strengths on a piece of paper at your desk.
- Facilitator will call on participants to share new strength.

## Considerations:

- What efforts have been made to improve regional air quality that we can build off / learn from?
- What community assets are in place that we can leverage to improve air quality?



## Community Engagement / Education

Community congregates at events, including Farmers Market

Community groups supporting education / active local programs

## Studies, analysis and data

Lot's of data / monitoring information to demonstrate the problem

## Data

Improvement in air quality data in Comox through ongoing initiatives

## Timing

COVID re: public awareness of health and mortality

Shared issue leads to collaboration across jurisdictions

Community enjoys outdoor activities

Awareness that industry must be included

Diversity of Roundtable

Grassroots community groups work, including events

Strong and active community

## Public Interest / awareness

Awareness of woodsmoke as a health issue

Buy-in from community that there is a problem

Initiatives such as the Roundtable

Success stories of switching away from woodstoves

Willingness of community to act

Smoke management planning

History of smoke management planning between industrial burners and government.

Back-yard burning ban improved air quality

Municipal + rural commitment and action

## Sophisticated industry

Local passion and knowledge on wood heating

Large hearth manufacturing industry working to reduce PM from new stoves

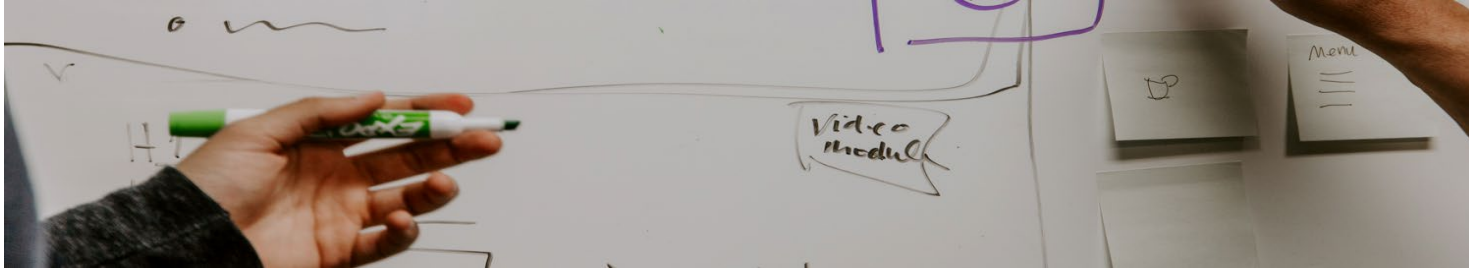
Limit of industry burning days

## Political Commitment

Regional growth strategy to drive process



# Barriers - Activity



## Instructions:

- Write three barriers on a piece of paper at home
- Facilitator will call on participants to share a new barrier

## Considerations:

- What barriers have already been surfaced in today's presentation, or in the Memo?
- From your perspective, what do you see as the main barriers to improving air quality?



burning  
wood may  
be seen as  
"green"

Disbelief that  
modern stoves  
burn clean

**Change is  
hard!**

Accurate  
information  
available

## Public Perception / Education

Perception  
that new  
wood stoves  
are the  
solution

Education -  
How to get  
information  
out?

Conflicting  
messaging.  
Ex. wood  
stove needed  
for  
emergencies

Funding and  
enforcement

**Require  
bipartisan  
solutions**

Lack of  
garbage  
pick-up -  
burning  
recycling, yard  
waste

**Difficult  
to  
regulate  
bylaw**

## Regulatory holes / Planning

climate  
change and  
imported AQ  
pollutants

Cost and  
convenience

## Affordability

Affordable  
way for  
farmers to  
deal with  
excess  
biomass

Diverse  
community  
cannot afford  
to switch  
heating

Desire to  
gather outside  
and around  
fire

## Cultural Practices

Right to burn -  
balance with  
responsibility

Perception  
that people  
have the right  
to burn wood



# Break-out Rooms

Each break-out group will be assigned a barrier theme

Please consider:

## **Barriers:**

- Why are these barriers?
- What more information do we need to address it?

## **Opportunities:**

- What are your first thought on how to address these barriers?
- Who do we need to involve in solutions?
- Are there best practice examples from elsewhere to draw on?



### Breakout Group 1 – Public Education and Perception

- ☐ Culture – deeply embedded “warm, dry burn of wood” – creating our own conflicts by not acknowledging nature of rural life in BC
- ☐ Anthropological need for fire – core part of human identity
- ☐ Vancouver Island per capita largest wood burners in western world
- ☐ Not about doing what you want to do, rather it is about the right to energy security – important as an Island community – also don’t have a culture of accepting outside influence/involvement in decision-making around home heating
- ☐ Energy efficiency of homes is a challenge
- ☐ Health impacts on community – re-invent our relationship with wood burning in order to address health and well-being of community – working within community understand the importance of wood burning
- ☐ Need compassion to overcome this barrier – much of the material starts with value statements versus data points – language is threatening – strengths is community lead as well as a barrier – leaves people feeling very defensive
- ☐ Perception is that timber industry is a free-for-all – not a lot of recognition that industry is highly regulated – usually just one month per year that industry impacts community
- ☐ Data on open burning is lumped together – how can we cluster the data to make sources more accurate – breakdown the 45% of open burning source – disaggregate and show breakdown over the course of the year (detailed categories and time scale)
- ☐ Wood smoke reduction program – surprised to see lack of data on reduction in PM2.5 levels relative to swap out
- ☐ Use of language – rural and non-rural
- ☐ Growing concern about CO2 emissions and climate change – benefit analysis of different fuel sources – people are considering their emissions as well as particulate matter – part of decision-making matrix – need to blend conversation with climate change



## Breakout Group 2 – Regulatory holes / planning

Barrier examples:

- ☐ Focus tends to be on health issues, how to look at air quality holistically (Climate change impacts, transportation)
- ☐ Difficult to create bylaws that are easy to understand - open burning, wood stoves, etc
- ☐ So many jurisdictions (munis, fire service districts, electoral areas, prov/fed, etc). Results in inconsistency and confusion (even around existing regulations)
- ☐ Hard to quantify the impact of intervention (e.g. garbage pick-up, woodstove exchanges, education, etc)
- ☐ Enforcement of regulations (boots on the ground, proof, cost, desire to encourage compliance rather than enforce - more investment into community readiness and response)

What more information do we need?

- ☐ Evaluation of interventions - new bylaws/regulations

What are your first thoughts on how to address these barriers?

- ☐ Finding a balance between community readiness /response and enforcement (Dr. Henry approach!). Thinking about compromise to make good decisions
- ☐ Finding the right framing to approach the issue - individual vs. the whole community
- ☐ Make sure we understand the social and cultural elements to behaviour
- ☐ Review regulatory and public education best practices

Who do we need to involve in solutions?

- ☐ The public
- ☐ Government

Are there best practice examples from elsewhere?

- ☐ There are and we would like to explore them!





### Break-out Group 3 – Affordability

#### Barrier examples:

- ☐ Cost and convenience - make a better choice
- ☐ Diverse community cannot afford to switch heating
- ☐ Affordable way for farmers to deal with excess biomass
- ☐ Economic impacts are not equally distributed
- ☐ Poor air quality creates economic hardships. If you have to move / medicate due to impacts, that has an economic impact as well.

#### Why are these barriers?

- ☐ Hard to deal with the community wellbeing, rather than our own.
- ☐ Willingness to give up creature comforts is low.
- ☐ Some folks are interested in change, but folks don't know how.

#### What more information do we need?

- ☐ Woodstoves provide valuable back-up power - give people incentive to use clean electricity.
- ☐ People avoid high electrical bills by using wood burning appliances.

#### What are your first thoughts on how to address these barriers?

- ☐ Make opportunities equal - support those who cannot afford.
- ☐ Supporting people to make change- coaching.
- ☐ Identify co-benefits- where we all win!
- ☐ 2020 vision opportunities- making connections between human activities and other positive impacts. Working from home, eg. find Co-benefits.
- ☐ Things to note:
  - ☐ Offer full costs of health impacts associated with burning green wood / inefficient burning.
  - ☐ Demonstrating full costs - provide incentives for up-front costs.
  - ☐ Show models of potential improvements.

#### Who do we need to involve in solutions?

- ☐ Costs- 2 tier electrical costs. Negatively affect rural, people burn due to high cost of electricity. Need to find alternatives.

#### General notes:

- ☐ Costs linked to education. Full picture- note just \$.
- ☐ Affordability is linked to values and linked to education.
- ☐ Link to health.
- ☐ Real time information.
- ☐ Risk Richter scale -  $A+B=C$ .
- ☐ How do you make it affordable to improve situation?
- ☐ System change- wood pellet stoves. - Support pellets.



## Breakout Group 4 – Cultural Practices

Barrier examples:

- ☐ Desire to gather outside and around campfire
- ☐ Perception people have the right to burn

Why are these barriers?

- ☐ What you learned as a kid - what happened in your family.
- ☐ Cultural / cross-cultural need to gather around fire.
- ☐ Enjoyable.
- ☐ “That’s how I’ve always done it” perspective
- ☐ Burning of cedar involves lots of pitch and resin - problem for air quality
- ☐ Do not change out wood stove as other appliances (especially in older generation)
- ☐ First Nations - smoke is part of cultural ceremonies
  - ☐ Smoke conduit to spirit world
  - ☐ Backyard cooking - BBQ
    - ☐ Salmon smoking
- ☐ Industrial burn piles by forestry is a cultural practice

What are your first thoughts on how to address these barriers?

- ☐ Education
  - ☐ Good, dry firewood.
  - ☐ Educate children on smart burning! Has this been happening? Are there examples?
- ☐ Barrier: Resourcing needed to educate every new homeowner with a wood stove
  - ☐ How do you keep track over who needs to be educated?
  - ☐ Way to deactivate older stoves with new homeowners?
- ☐ Cultural shift towards clean burning needed
  - ☐ Acceptable to burn wood as long as it’s done responsibly
- ☐ Wood Burning is intrinsically old fashioned - has not progressed
  - ☐ Challenge for getting beyond inefficient wood stoves.
- ☐ Political pressure needed
- ☐ Perception that burning wood is climate friendly
  - ☐ Generate black carbon

Who do we need to involve in solutions?

- ☐ First Nations
- ☐ New homeowners
- ☐ Children

Are there best practice examples from elsewhere?

- ☐ Example in Comox: Goose spit beach fires
  - ☐ Set up fire rings with educational piece, sold or provided dry wood
  - ☐ Means to gather in a responsible way



# Report Back

Each group share key messages / reflections from your break-out conversations:

Comments may address:

- What insights from the root causes of barriers were discussed?
- What early thoughts on opportunities were shared?
- Who needs to be involved in the solutions?
- Other thoughts



# Next Steps

- Presentation materials and meeting notes to follow
- Communications: Social media / State of the Air FAQs / Video
- Next Steering Committee Meeting Mid-October
- Next Roundtable meeting – Late November

THANK YOU!

