

Mr. Steve Noble,
Mayor
City of Kingston, NY

Dear Mayor Noble:

We, the membership of Hudson Valley Air Quality Coalition and the undersigned Kingston residents, are writing about the multiple, recent wildfires in the Hudson Valley: Greenwood Lake, Plattekill, Denning, Red Hook to name a few. At the time, Ulster County was designated at the “highest” fire risk, there was a protracted drought, and there was dry leaf tinder all over the valley, as residents and towns had not collected all leaves for the season. Residents were warned that even the slightest spark from any source such as a cigarette could ignite a fire.

On November 10th, air quality in the Hudson Valley contained very unhealthy levels of fine particulate matter, extending as far north as Schenectady.

Governor Hochul implemented a burn ban in mid-November that allowed backyard fire pits, contained campfires, and small cooking fires, despite the high fire risk. This was irresponsible because “Humans cause nearly 90% of wildfires in the United states via discarded cigarettes, unattended campfires, burning debris, or through equipment malfunctions.”¹

Given these conditions, allowing “backyard fire pits and contained campfires less than three feet in height and four feet in length, width, or diameter” and “contained cooking fires” is not just a bad idea, it can jeopardize the health, safety, lives, homes and property of all who live in and around this city.

According to Ulster County and other available information², many jurisdictions in Ulster County —in fact all, except Kingston— enacted their own burn bans, many of them explicitly strict. But Kingston—the most densely populated city in the county—failed to do so. What we have learned from experts about the current California wildfires — that fires in densely populated areas are much harder to “steer” and control, makes Kingston’s lack of action particularly concerning. Even Steve Neuhaus, the Orange County (NY) Executive who went to fight the recent CA fires, named urban density as one of the most difficult factors.³ In addition, wood frame houses (which make up a large portion of both Altadena and Kingston housing stock) are most at risk. And fire risk both here and there was at the highest possible level.

Kingston was lucky to avoid catastrophe this time due to favorable winds, but climate-driven high wind conditions are becoming much more frequent here. In addition, the variety of other conditions that we share with California make future risks unacceptable.

This letter demands that you enact clear, explicit, and strict burn bans, prohibiting all outdoor burning—including backyard fire pits, contained campfires, and small cooking fires— to protect residents from future fire dangers and dangerous air pollution.

Respectfully,
Hudson Valley Air Quality Coalition Members,
and the Undersigned Kingston Residents:

¹ <https://ulstercountyny.gov/emergency-services/burn-ban>

² Congressional Research Service, “Wildfire Statistics.” Accessed June 29, 2022.

³ <https://www.wamc.org/news/2025-01-18/orange-county-executive-steve-neuhaus-on-trip-to-california-to-support-wildfire-containment-efforts>

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