

Inversions Cause Particulate to Build Up

Wood smoke is a major source of fine particulate matter, a small soot-like substance. Fine particulate matter that is smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter is called PM_{2.5}. Much smaller than a human hair, it gets deep into the lungs beyond the body's defenses.

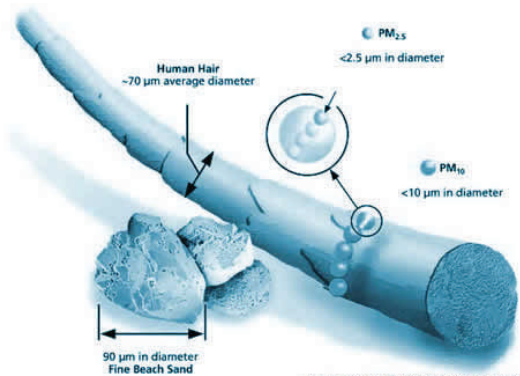
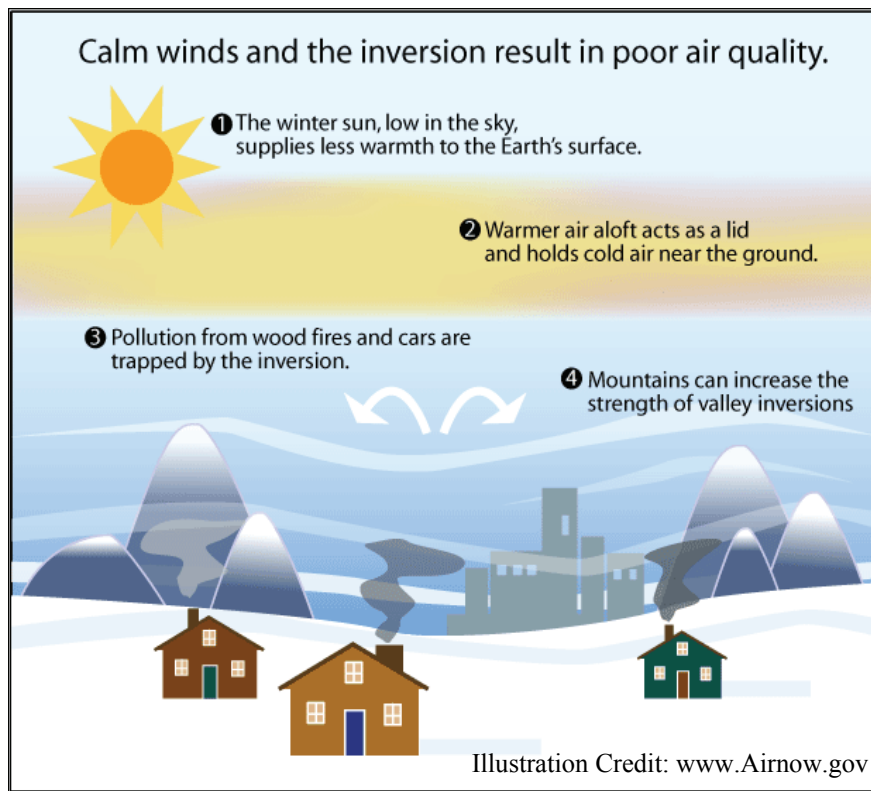


Image courtesy of EPA, Office of Research and Development



During wintertime inversions, warm air sits on top of cold air, trapping wood smoke around our homes.

Cold air is heavier than warm air so it sinks to the ground and creeps along valley bottoms and river bottoms.

There is an inversion much of the time in the winter.

Inversions are often region wide, encompassing many counties at once. Fine particulate matter can move between valleys as it follows the areas of lower elevation and wind patterns. Many distant parts of Missoula County can and do share air.