

News Release

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For Immediate Release



San Joaquin Valley
Air Pollution
Control District

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Less Wood Burning by Residents Helped Improve Winter Air Quality

Fresno, California – The outstanding cooperation of Valley residents this winter in voluntarily curtailing their fireplace and woodstove use resulted in fewer days than originally anticipated that burning was prohibited.

This was the first winter that Valley residents were prohibited by the Valley Air District from burning fireplaces, woodstoves and other wood-burning heaters during periods of unhealthy air quality. But as the wood-burning season officially comes to an end Feb. 29, Valley Air District officials say even voluntary self-curtailment by residents helped reduce wintertime air pollution.

“Valley residents refrained from burning this winter, not only on days when no burning was allowed but also on days when they were discouraged from burning,” said Dave Crow, the District’s Air Pollution Control Officer. “Their actions definitely helped improve the Valley’s wintertime air quality. People saw the value of not burning and that has allowed Valley residents to breathe easier.”

District officials expect the season to end Sunday night with wood-burning bans on just two days since Nov. 1 in the eight-county District. Wood-burning curtailment days – when burning was prohibited – were called Nov. 18 in Fresno and Kern county and in Fresno County only on Jan. 23.

District meteorologists predict air pollution levels for the following day based on weather forecasts and other factors and explain them to the public using the Air Quality Index (AQI). A curtailment occurs when AQI values are projected to be in the “unhealthy” range at 151 or above. On the two forecast curtailment days, air quality failed to reach unhealthy levels.

Supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp said the District had expected 20 to 25 curtailment days this year, based on previous winters. “That has been our experience over the past three years of measuring. This year was difficult to forecast because particulate levels were only slightly above health standards. In previous years, the highest winter AQIs were greater than 200. This year, the highest concentrations seen on our real-time monitors were 154 in Bakersfield, 153 in Fresno and 155 in Modesto.”

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Preliminary analysis indicates that people stopped burning when a curtailment day was called.

“Perhaps the most significant aspect of this measure is the ‘burning discouraged’ calls made by the District,” Crow said. “It is clear from the public’s response to this advisory that AQI levels of 151 or higher were averted, thus reducing the number of expected prohibitions. It is this kind of public awareness and action that will bode well for improving wintertime air quality.”

Wood burning was discouraged this season on 60 days in various parts of the eight-county district, as follows:

Fresno County: 53 days
Valley portion of Kern County: 49.
Stanislaus County: 32
Tulare County: 23
Merced County: 13
Madera County: 10
San Joaquin County: 6
Kings County: 1

Residents are asked to check air quality conditions before lighting fires and are discouraged from burning when the AQI is predicted to be between 101 and 150.

The weather also played a part in this year’s low number of curtailment days. Shipp said, “In past years, weather patterns have been stable for longer periods. When this happens, wood smoke and emissions from morning traffic cause air pollution to rise to unhealthy levels. We didn’t have those long, stagnant periods this winter.”

The 25,000-square-mile San Joaquin Valley is among eight areas in the country considered seriously out of compliance with federal standards for particulate matter. Due to the severity of the Valley’s wintertime air pollution, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency required the District to reduce particulate matter emissions valley-wide. Residential wood burning can add more than 24 tons per day of harmful soot, dust and ash particles to Valley air quality problems.

The District’s wood-burning rule has two other components aimed at improving wintertime air quality. It limits the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new residential developments and requires that any woodstove or fireplace insert left in a home when it is sold or transferred meet 1990 EPA emissions standards.

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