

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

News Release

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Residential wood-burning rule scheduled for vote

Proposed wood-burning restrictions designed to improve wintertime air quality could be adopted Thursday by the Governing Board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Rule 4901, Wood-Burning Fireplaces and Wood-Burning Heaters, is scheduled for a public hearing and vote during the Governing Board's monthly meeting, scheduled for 9 a.m. Thursday, July 17. The meeting will be video-conferenced among the Air District's regional offices in Fresno at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.; in Modesto at 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130; and in Bakersfield at 2700 M St., Suite 275. Residents may attend and provide comment at any of the three locations.

The proposed rule includes a mandatory no-burn program for winter nights when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy; a retrofit requirement to ensure wood-burning devices are as clean as possible prior to the transfer or sale of property; and a limit on the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new developments. The proposed new rule has been under development since April 2002. Since then, hundreds of comments have been received and numerous organizations, including the American Lung Association of Central California and the Fresno-based Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, have expressed support for the changes.

Dr. David Pepper, a founding member of the Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, considers the rule an important step in protecting human health.

"Some may argue that it is an individual's right to burn whenever they want. But breathing clean air is an individual's right, too, as is the right to live without asthma and without lung cancer," Pepper said.

The Air District's current residential wood-burning rule was adopted in 1993 to protect Valley residents from the serious health effects of airborne particulates, tiny airborne particles that can get lodged deep in the lungs. Particulates include microscopic fly ash, nitrates, salts, sulfates, dust, smoke and soot. During winter months, residential wood burning adds more than 24 tons per day of particulates to Valley air quality problems.

The existing wood-burning rule includes a voluntary no-light program and prohibits the retail sale of anything but the cleanest-burning devices on the market. However, in Feb. 2002 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that the rule doesn't fully comply with the federal Clean Air Act and must be strengthened.

The proposed changes include:

Mandatory curtailment. When airborne particulates are forecast to reach unhealthy levels, burning wood in a home-heating device would be prohibited in the affected counties. Based on historical data, this would happen about 25 days during the winter. The mandatory curtailment wouldn't apply to homes above 3,000 feet in elevation, that do not have natural gas service, or in which wood burning is the sole source of heat. Similar programs exist in Mammoth Lakes, California and Reno, Nevada.

Density Limits. Beginning Jan. 1, 2004, no wood-burning devices would be allowed in new developments with more than two dwellings per acre. In new developments with one or two dwellings per acre, one wood-burning device would be allowed in each dwelling.

Change-out requirement. Also beginning Jan. 1, 2004, the rule would require the removal or retirement of non-EPA-certified wood-burning devices prior to the sale or transfer of property. The devices could be replaced with natural gas, propane or EPA-certified Phase II wood-burning units.

During Thursday's meeting, the District's Governing Board could vote to approve the proposed rule, to reject it, or to address it during a future meeting. The board is made up of 11 locally elected officials from throughout the Valley air basin. The air basin includes eight Valley counties and extends nearly 25,000 square miles. For more information, visit www.valleyair.org or call (559) 230-5800.