

Community Voices

Wood fireplace ban will hurt much, help little

December 9, 2002 Posted: 05:35:13 AM PST, Modesto Bee

By CONSTANCE NGUYEN

This time of year makes one think of the classic song.

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire

Oh, wait! This is the Central Valley. Let's make that walnuts or almonds.

Oh, wait again! We can't roast anything on an open fire since it will be contributing to the lousy air quality in the valley.

Wait! Why are we going to be denied the right to have a wood fire when air quality standards for industry are being lowered? Government is once again showing its preference for the big guy when they thought this one up.

And what is this about hot line phone numbers to turn in your neighbor? Have we become a country where Big Brother is watching? Has government even considered what will happen to relations in communities where covert wood-burning becomes the crime of the century?

In this day of hair-trigger tempers, all one needs is to think that an evening's enjoyment, spent leisurely in front of a wood fire, can be a reportable offense resulting in punishment. Disputes will turn ugly.

Who is thinking up these things? It can't be real people. Real people know that it isn't the little guy who is causing the lion's share of the dirty air. It's time to look to the real sources of the problem.

Is government really paying attention to what this whole fire and air issue looks like? Doubtful.

If it were, it would see that taking the wood burning out of the fireplace will also take livelihood away from some who earn their income through sales of the wood that would be banned on certain days, as well as leaving the issue of tree disposal for farmers an open question.

The old nonproductive trees will have to be removed somehow. They aren't branches that can just be tossed into a woodchipper. This may add to the expenses of the already overburdened farmer.

One more troubling point has occurred to me. Isn't it convenient that if you cannot use the wood to burn, natural gas will be the approved source?

Perhaps someone who may not be horribly objective might be lobbying approval on this ban. Sounds like a sure thing for the energy companies to get a little extra in their bank accounts on this issue.

I cannot imagine not having the comfort of a real wood fire. The aroma, the popping and crackling. The glow when it dies down to coals. It is part of the enjoyment of the whole experience. To many, the heat issued is a welcome bonus.

The thought of the hiss of gas, followed by the lack of personality of ceramic logs that never budge, engulfed in a blue flame, is depressing.

There are so few simple pleasures left to the average working person. Now big government will try to deny us another.

Once again, I say, this time of year reminds me of that classic song -- of course now with the appropriate modifications for the Central Valley:
Walnuts roasting on a propane fire.

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee **Public left out**

By Kathie Gregory
Fresno

(Published Tuesday, December 10, 2002, 5:50 AM)

My husband and I attended the meeting on Dec. 3 held by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District concerning fireplace burning.

The personnel conducting this meeting announced that it was an opportunity for the public to learn and to comment on the proposed limitations on the use of non-natural-gas home heating and fireplace use.

The information provided by the personnel from the district was extremely incomplete, and when the opportunity was provided for the public to comment or to ask questions, those attending were told that only five individuals would be allowed to speak. Coincidentally, there were five individuals already standing in line, two of whom were from the same group.

There was no opportunity to ask questions concerning what other measures were being taken to reduce pollution or even to ask what the other sources of

pollution are besides fireplace use, which was said to comprise a very small amount of the pollution in the San Joaquin Valley.

The end result of this meeting was the impression that the decisions have already been made and that no comments from the public will make any difference. The information provided at the meeting indicated that no private citizens' opinions were actually sought or had ever been considered in drafting the proposed rules.

Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee

Subversive cells

By Jim Doyle

Fresno

(Published Tuesday, December 10, 2002, 5:50 AM)

Honda Motors recently announced the release of a fuel cell-powered vehicle. A fuel cell ingests hydrogen and excretes water. No hydrocarbons, no particulate matter, no pollution.

So how long will it be until the Bush administration and its glut of oil industry pimps and hacks suggest we invade Japan to protect American oil interests?

George W. Bush -- our weapon of mass deception.

Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian

Monday December 09, 2002, 06:10:06 PM

Two issues are confusing

There is one sentence in a recent story on fireplace restrictions that was very confusing to me: "The district faces a deadline next year to impose tougher rules or face penalties that could include a loss of federal highway funding."

Why would lighting a fireplace have anything to do with highway funding?

Why are the two issues related?

LEONA DOUGLASS, Bakersfield

Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian

Saturday December 07, 2002, 06:30:11 PM

Worth the sacrifice

This is in response to assertions in a last Sunday's opinion article from a manufacturer of fireplace logs.

The Valley Air District doesn't attribute 30 percent of the annual emissions of particulate matter of 10 microns (PM10) to residential wood burning. Since people don't use fireplaces all year, using an annual average isn't a realistic assessment.

To determine the amount of wintertime pollution from wood fires, the Valley Air District analyzes filters from valley air monitoring stations and the California Regional Particulate Matter Air Quality Study. These filters indicate that approximately 30 percent of PM10 and smaller particles (PM2.5) on some of our worst winter days comes from residential wood burning.

We agree that manufactured logs create 16 grams of particulates per hour and they are cleaner than burning wood in a fireplace. EPA-certified inserts or stoves are better, emitting less than seven grams per hour of use. Gas and pellet stoves emit less than one.

The author questioned whether emissions from residential wood burning warrant limitations. Studies show that even moderate amounts of particulates can cause or aggravate asthma attacks.

One out of six children in our valley has asthma. It is the number one chronic condition for youths, the leading cause of school absenteeism and the third ranking cause of hospital admissions for youths under 15. That is why the Valley Air District proposes limiting wood burning on stagnant, polluted nights as many other areas do.

Isn't the health of our children worth foregoing a few fires each winter?

JOSETTE MERCED BELLO, Public Education Administrator, San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District

Tehachapi blown away by power plans

By JOHN NELSON, Bakersfield Californian correspondent
Sunday December 08, 2002, 10:29:16 PM

TEHACHAPI -- Look what just blew into town.

It's a pair of electric cars that the city of Tehachapi plans to recharge using wind power. You might say they ride with the wind.

"We decided if we're going to use pollution-free automobiles, we might as well power them without creating any pollution," City Manager Jason Caudle said.

The city leased the two electric vehicles -- a Toyota RAV4 and a Ford pickup -- about four months ago, then erected the wind turbine on Nov. 26. Plans are to

switch on the turbine at a dedication ceremony Dec. 16.

The city will use the energy generated by the wind turbine to help run its sewage treatment plant, where the turbine is located, as well as offset the cost of recharging what it hopes is a growing fleet of electric vehicles.

"It's like driving a big golf cart," Tehachapi Development Director David James said. "They're a lot of fun, and most people are surprised at how much power they have. I'm going to turn my old car into a cube of metal pretty soon."

James is driving the Toyota, while the Ford is being used for airport maintenance. Each is leased for three years.

A city study estimates that each car will take more than 5,000 pounds of pollutants out of the air annually, and the company that installed the turbine, Oak Creek Energy Systems Inc., says the city could save \$8,000 to \$10,000 on its Con Ed bill every year.

"We think this approach of governments and businesses making their own renewable energy -- especially in light of the high rates they have to pay now -- makes a lot of sense," Oak Creek Vice President Ed Duggan said.

About \$60,000 for the project came from a grant administered by the Kern County Air Pollution Control District. The rest, some \$40,000 to \$50,000 in labor and materials, came from Oak Creek Energy, Solvenson Equipment Co., the electrical firm of Kemco, and Dressel Enterprises, which built the foundation for the wind turbine.

"We all thought this was a really good thing to do for the city to show how renewable energy can benefit a city directly," Duggan said.

The project began about a year ago when the city decided to apply for the grant.

"We felt it was a great opportunity to get these electric vehicles and set an example by driving clean cars," Caudle said. "Then, we added the idea of partnering with Oak Creek to provide pollution-free electricity for our pollution-free cars."

James said Tehachapi followed the example of California City, then took it a couple of steps farther.

"We decided to kick it up a notch, like Emeril says, and add the wind turbine," James said. "We're also talking to the school district about going into the schools to talk about alternative energy and electric cars." Even the turbine itself is a renewed source of energy.

"It's a 15-year-old Nordtank 65-kilowatt turbine that we rebuilt and slowed down, and now it's about a 30-kilowatt turbine," Duggan said. "By slowing it down, it makes it quieter and will allow it to last longer. It should go for another 15 years."

Slowing it down also allows it to operate efficiently in winds that are lighter than those at higher altitudes, where most of the local wind farms are located, Duggan said.

"We're in the renewable energy business," Duggan said. "So when the older turbines were replaced, we wanted to find homes for some of the ones that were still in good shape. We felt it was consistent with our green energy type of business."

Along with the wind, there's a little bit of smoke and mirrors involved in the project. The cars won't be directly recharged by the turbine. The wind power will help run the sewage plant, and the money saved will be budgeted against the cost of recharging the cars.

It will also allow James to scrap his 1988 Mercury Sable station wagon.

"It probably produced even more pollution than the studies indicated," James said, "because it ran like such a chicken."

Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian

Letters on point: Fireplaces and the song of 'Blue skies'

Thursday December 05, 2002, 05:45:08 PM

Government antics laughable I have a lung disease. Yet, I would also join the people who are angry over the proposed ban on the use of fireplaces during the winter months. I also would join those who fight to use their outdoor barbecues in the summer months.

Governmental "wisdom" in going after the little guy must stop and be recognized for what it is: a Band-Aid solution actually designed to appease constituents into the faulty belief something is being done to take care of yet another pollution problem.

Let's get real, people. Individual fireplace smoke and/or BBQ smoke are transient and temporary while we allow all manner of large pollutants and polluters to go unchallenged and actually welcomed into this area. Two large freeways,

unmanageable animal factories and dry topsoil dust particulates containing toxic chemicals are the big ones.

I have begun to call these "wee people laws," such as the original smog control for all passenger vehicles, omitting the real pollution experts -- large trucks and buses -- that drive through our counties unhampered by the "clean air" bureaucrats. Get the little guy. It is easier and looks good in the media.

Also concerning long-range planning of which our lawmakers are neophytes, we have yet another law which is truly unenforceable -- unless the city is counting on neighbors who will snitch on each other. Are we going to have police officers driving around looking for smoke now?

The antics of our government officials are more entertainment than any television sitcom, resembling more accurately the reality shows "Fear Factor" and "Survivor" combined.

LISA McINTYRE, Bakersfield

Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian

Slow down development

Thursday December 05, 2002, 05:45:08 PM

Isn't it amazing how quickly everyone is to point out how horrible it is for us to use our fireplace or barbeque for entertainment or warmth?

We build and build and build to our hearts' content so that we can live up to our "development friendly" reputation here in Kern County, but never think of the consequences. As a second-generation prune picker, I would much rather see smoke from the chimney than traffic jams in Rosedale.

Wake up, folks. Knock off the rampant development and try to preserve your way of life. Certainly, the planning commission doesn't have the sense to do it.

RANDY RHYNES, Bakersfield

Letter to the Editor, Bakersfield Californian

Can't wait to start singing

Thursday December 05, 2002, 05:45:08 PM

In recent years, there has been about \$100 million spent on studies to determine what is causing all of this bad air in Bakersfield.

Thank goodness the cause has finally been found. Fireplaces! Who would of thunk it? Money well spent!
Whatever happened to that \$75,000 blimp?

What will happen to all of those people studying our air now that the problem has been found? For the next \$100 million, maybe they can use it to make a study to find out why all those darn dogs bark.

Soon we will all be singing, "Blue skies smiling at me."
KENNETH M. CANNON, Bakersfield