

Bad air fuels burn ban today

Fireplaces doused in Fresno and Kern counties.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

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Air authorities have ordered the San Joaquin Valley's historic first ban of fireplace wood burning for today in Fresno and Kern counties.

The air is too dirty, stagnant and unhealthy in those two counties for residents to burn wood in fireplaces, stoves or heaters from 12:01 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. today.

Residents of two other counties, Stanislaus and Tulare, are being asked to voluntarily curb wood burning.

The wood-burning restrictions were announced Monday afternoon by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which regulates one of the worst places in the country for soot, ash and other microscopic pollution.

Officials said the burn ban and voluntary efforts may prevent the Valley from breaking the health standard for particle pollution today.

"This could definitely make the difference," said district supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp.

The air problems today are connected to a dome of high pressure over the Valley. With warm air high above the Valley, cooler air is trapped below the dome, holding ash, soot and other pollution at ground level.

The National Weather Service reported the pattern promotes patches of dense fog. "It could continue on Wednesday and Thursday," said weather service meteorologist Daniel Harty in Hanford.

So there could be more no-burn days this week.

To find out whether Wednesday will be a no-burn day, call the district at (800) 766-4463 or check the district's Web site at www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>>. Officials said they expect a lot of calls, so people may need to be patient and wait several rings before getting an answer.

Today marks the first ban on wood burning in homes as a result of a rule change that was forced last year by an environmental lawsuit. For years, the district had asked residents for voluntary burning reductions on dirty-air days.

Inspectors today and tonight will cruise neighborhoods in Fresno and Kern counties, looking for smoke coming out of chimneys. Neighbors can report burning violations by calling (800) 870-1037 in Fresno County and (800) 926-5550 in Kern County.

Violators could face a fine from \$50 to \$1,000. Residents in Stanislaus and Tulare counties, where only voluntary compliance is requested today, are not subject to fines.

The remaining four counties in the district -- San Joaquin, Merced, Madera and Kings -- have no restrictions today on residential wood burning.

Even if a no-burn day has been called in your county, there are four exemptions:

Natural gas or propane devices.

A wood-burning device as sole source of heat.

People who live above 3,000 feet.

People who live where natural gas service is unavailable.

Fresno and Kern counties, with the two largest cities in the Valley, could experience up to 20 or 25 no-burn days this winter.

The district forecasts restrictions based on the air quality index, a scale from a clean zero to a lung-searing 300 or above. When the index reaches 100, officials call for voluntary curbs on burning. When it reaches 150, burning is banned.

"This one on Tuesday is not the worst day you'll see," said Shipp. "We think it will get close to 160. Later in the year, it could get to 200."

[Tuesday, November 18, Modesto Bee](#)

ENVIRONMENT

2nd day for burn advisory

A fireplace burning advisory is in effect today in Stanislaus County, the second consecutive day for such a declaration. Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Control District said today's Stanislaus County air quality forecast is unhealthy for sensitive groups. To keep the air from getting worse, people are asked to refrain from burning wood in fireplaces, on a voluntary basis. A "discouraged" logo on Page A-1 today signifies the burn advisory. It applies only to Stanislaus County in the Northern San Joaquin Valley. To the south, the air district declared today as a mandatory no-burn day in Fresno County and the valley portion of Kern County. Daily reports on fireplace burning are available by telephone, 800-766-4463, and online, www.valleyair.org.

[Tuesday, November 18, Turlock Journal](#)

Voluntary 'no burn' request issued

By From staff reports - Turlock Journal

Because the air quality in and around Stanislaus County is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive groups today, residents are being asked to refrain from wood burning.

The voluntary request, which will be in effect through midnight, is also being issued in Tulare County.

However, in Fresno and the valley portions of Kern counties, burning wood, manufactured firelogs or pellets is prohibited because of expected unhealthy air

pollution levels.

According to Anthony Presto, a Modesto-based spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, voluntarily refraining from wood burning in Stanislaus County will help improve air quality immediately and avoid mandatory prohibitions.

To burn more cleanly, residents who choose to burn during a voluntary restriction are asked to use pellet stoves, manufactured firelogs and EPA-certified stoves or inserts.

Air quality for Madera, Merced, Kings and San Joaquin counties is forecast to be moderate for Tuesday. Therefore, curtailments are not necessary in those areas, Presto said.

The Air District reminds residents in all parts of the Valley not to burn trash, newspapers, magazines or treated wood in their fireplaces or stoves. Doing so is hazardous and illegal.

Exemptions from burning restrictions apply to homes in which wood burning is the only source of heat because no other heating device is built into the home. Homes above 3,000 feet or those that do not have access to natural gas service - even if they have access to propane - also are exempt from the burning restrictions.

More information on the district's fireplace and wood stove program is available at www.valleyair.org.

[Tuesday, November 18, Tracy Press](#)

Fuel for thought

Gretchen Macchiarella <<mailto:gretchen@tracypress.com>>Tracy Press

Chris Headrick was taking a load of firewood from his Stockton storage unit to South Lake Tahoe on Monday. The demand for dry wood hasn't waned there, but confusion over new fireplace restrictions in the San Joaquin Valley seems to have slowed business locally.

There has been a lot of publicity surrounding the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's decision to enforce a handful of no-burn days when pollution levels get severe. Headrick said it has put a lot of negative information out.

"It scares people from using their fireplaces," he said.

He spends a lot of time explaining that there will probably only be three days all winter when residential fires are not allowed in San Joaquin County.

District educator Anthony Presto said he probably spends more time than anyone reassuring people that they can still have a roaring fire nearly every night. He said some of the scariest misinformation probably comes from people who don't want the regulations at all.

"There have been people that feel their God-given right to burn wood is being taken away," he said. "The right to breathe clean air far outweighs the right to have an ambiance fire in your fireplace."

Headrick said he agrees that there are times when the pollution is too bad to allow fires to add to it, but he said there are also a lot of good technologies available to help keep it clean. He said more fuel-efficient stoves and other measures can do more on a day-to-day basis.

"There should be more emphasis on catalytic converters (for chimneys)," he said. The district has to take every "feasible control measure" to meet federal Environmental Protection Agency standards, Presto said. The mandate amounts to restricting fireplace use, because residential wood smoke is about one-third of particulate matter pollution, or large particles that hang in the air and affect air quality.

The Central Valley's pollution has led to rules stricter than anywhere else, Presto said. The fireplace restrictions have been voluntary up until now, he said, but that hasn't worked, so now it's possible to be ticketed for having a fire of any kind on a day when the air quality levels are unhealthy.

"It is fair, because it is a step to protect the public's health," he said.

Tracy resident Daniel Jones said he doesn't agree. He said burning wood is a natural part of the environment.

"Why make a law that goes against Mother Nature?" he said.

Because Jones' fireplace is the only source of heat in his home, he will be exempt from the rules. Still, he said he wonders if people will try to turn him in on a no-burn day.

"My family and I count on wood for heating our homes," he said. "I don't have a heater."

Jones said he uses firewood that comes from a tree-surgeon friend, and that's a better use for it than sending it to a landfill. While he's put his extra wood up for sale, he said, there haven't been many bites.

"This is the first year that we have sold it, but it has been very slow," he said.

Presto said there is a false sense among valley residents that the district is picking on people, but this was a measure of last resort.

"The district has addressed just about every other air pollution source that it has the jurisdiction to," he said.

Headrick said warm weather is also affecting business. "If we get 10 days of fog, I guarantee my phone will start ringing," he said.

But foggy days are also the most likely to have burn restrictions, because the air is not moving.

For information: 800-766-4463 or www.valleyair.org.

Kern County gets its first no-burn order

By CHARLES ADAMSON, Californian staff writer

Bakersfield Californian

Last Updated: Monday November 17th, 2003, 10:46 PM

You could be fined for using your fireplace today during the area's first ban on home wood burning.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has imposed its first mandatory one-day ban on lighting wood-burning fireplaces and stoves.

Violators face fines starting at \$50, but the penalty could eventually reach \$1,000 for repeat offenders.

Keith Stephens, 66, a resident who lives about eight miles northeast of Bakersfield, said he'll burn if wants to. Government is over-reaching its authority, he said, and if his neighbors decide to burn they can go ahead, too.

"I wouldn't rat on them if they did. I'm not my neighbor's keeper," Stephens said.

Air district spokeswoman Kelly Hogan Malay said high atmospheric pressure has caused stagnant air and rising levels of pollution. The trigger for a no-burn day is when the air quality index reaches levels deemed unhealthy for all.

Up until now there have only been voluntary no-burn days, which happen when air is unhealthy for some, but not all groups.

Malay said no more compliance officers will be on hand today than normal, but they will be responding to complaints.

"I don't think we'll get a lot of calls from people wanting to rat out their neighbors, but I think the calls we do get are going to come from people suffering from health impacts from wood smoke," Malay said. "We're really in uncharted territory. We're going to respond if people call, but we don't know how many people will."

Malay said she expects there will be from 15 to 25 mandatory no-burn days in Kern County until February.

All solid-fuel burning is prohibited, including wood, manufactured fire logs and pellets. The ban started at midnight this morning and ends at midnight tonight. Homes at elevations above 3,000 feet are exempt. Also exempt are homes with no other form of heating built in and those without access to natural gas.

In Stephens' case, he may be exempt anyway, because his home doesn't have natural gas hookups and the nearest line is a half-mile from his home, he said. He does heat his home with propane, though.

"Even if I had (natural) gas, I'd burn my fireplace when I darn well please," Stephens said.

The ban affects residents of the valley portions of Kern and in Fresno counties.

Stanislaus and Tulare county residents are being asked to voluntarily refrain from burning wood. There are no restrictions in Madera, Merced, Kings and San Joaquin counties, where the air quality is forecast to be moderate.

Dr. Patrick Leung, an allergist in Kern County for 25 years, said that when air quality reaches unhealthy levels, wood smoke increases symptoms in people with respiratory diseases.

"The wood smoke is a very strong irritant," Leung said. "I do support the no-burn days. I wish every one of us would do their part to help everyone else. It's a small sacrifice to keep the air better for every one of us."

