

Wood-burning ban goes into effect next Saturday

Fri., Oct. 24, Modesto Bee Editorial (not on line Friday)

The rules are about to change for using your fireplace and wood stove. On Nov. 1, the valley's air district will begin enforcing a ban on wood burning in homes and businesses on days when conditions make for especially bad air pollution.

On days when conditions aren't quite so bad, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will merely discourage the use of wood-burning fireplaces and stoves. On good air days the restrictions will be lifted.

Violators of the new rules will face fines, which will increase with each additional violation. District inspectors will be looking for violations, but will most likely depend on complaints from residents.

This is an important step toward cleaner air in the valley. Wintertime wood burning sends up to 24 tons of particulate matter into the air each day. That's as much as 30 percent of the particulate matter generated in urban neighborhoods. PM pollution is known to trigger asthma and other respiratory diseases.

There are exemptions:

Where wood burning is the sole source of heat.

Areas above 3,000 feet elevation.

Areas where natural gas service is not available.

Gas and propane devices are exempt.

The valley air district estimates the number of days with full restrictions will be somewhere between four and 25, depending on where you are. On Feb.28, the restrictions will end until the next winter.

We have always known that cleaning our dirty air would mean sacrifices. In this case, what we're giving up is largely an aesthetic pleasure -- not a necessity. We urge valley residents to get with the new program and become part of the solution so we can all breathe cleaner air.

To complain about an illegal burn, call 800-870-1037.

For updates on daily restrictions, call the smog information line, 800-766-4463.

For explanation of the rules, go to the district's Web site

www.valleyair.org, or call 557-6400.

Sunday, Oct. 26. The Record

Ban ignites burning questions

By Audrey Cooper

Published in Stockton Record - Sunday, October 26, 2002

The 2 acres behind Dave Smith's rural Stockton home should have plenty of space for new logs.

Instead, Smith is trying to get rid of the firewood that's been drying for more than a year. The entire 2-acre plot reserved for firewood piles is covered with seasoned logs stacked up to 10 feet high. Only enough space to drive a small truck is left between the giant piles.

Smith, a firewood dealer for more than 35 years, says confusion over new fireplace-use laws has contributed to a 60 percent drop in his business over the past year.

New restrictions on wood-burning fireplaces and stoves go into effect Saturday. Under the new rules, wood-burning fires and stoves will be forbidden on days with high pollution levels.

In San Joaquin County, air regulators expect to call no-burn nights about five times before the end of the winter. On the vast majority of winter evenings, wood burning will be allowed. Residents can tell if it is a no-burn day by calling 1-800-SMOG-LINE.

There are exemptions to the rules. Homes above 3,000 feet in elevation, homes in areas without natural-gas service and homes where a wood-burning stove or fireplace is the only source of heat are exempt from the restrictions.

Smith says he's constantly fielding calls from people who worry that they'll have to forgo a cozy fire on every chilly night.

"Everyone's asking what's going on. I mean, they don't even know if it's OK to put a candle in a jack-o'-lantern," Smith said.

Demand dampened

Smith used to employ eight workers to chop and split dead trees. The workers used to deliver about 12 cords of wood a day to customers. Now, Smith only has enough work for two employees and sells about four cords of wood daily. A cord equals about 128 cubic feet, or enough to fill about two pickup trucks.

Officials at the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District passed the wood-burning-fireplace rules at the insistence of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Previously, no-burn nights were voluntary. Under the new rules, homeowners could be fined between \$50 and \$1,000 if they're caught by inspectors burning wood on bad-air days.

The air district recently purchased infrared sensors that will help them determine if a fireplace is in use.

Wood fires emit more heat than natural-gas fires. Regulators also will take complaints from neighbors to find cheating wood burners.

Jeanette Craig, who is recovering from lung cancer and has breathing problems on polluted days, said she might be willing to turn in neighbors who ignore a daylong ban on wood burning. The 54-year-old Stockton resident said one of her neighbors burns wood in a pot-belly stove even in summer months.

"I don't burn in my fireplace because the bad air bothers me anyway. I think (the new rules) are a good idea," she said.

Burning wood contributes to the Valley's particulate pollution, which is tiny flecks of soot, dust and vapor that can lodge deep in human lungs. The pollution can cause cancer, breathing problems, asthma attacks and premature death. The Valley has never met federal health-based pollution limits.

Fireplaces are thought to be responsible for about 10 percent of the Valley's annual particulate pollution.

On particularly chilly nights, when many fires are roaring, residential smoke can cause up to 30 percent of the pollution, studies indicate.

An estimated 500,000 homes have wood-burning fireplaces or stoves, according to the Valley air district. As part of the new wood-burning rules, new homes almost always will have to install natural-gas fireplaces in lieu of regular masonry fireplaces.

Burn ban not absolute

Chris Headrick, who sells firewood at his Manteca produce stand off Highway 120, said many of his customers don't understand that no-burn nights will only be called when air is stagnant in the Valley. Stagnant air and foggy conditions can cause smoke to stay in the air for days.

Headrick says he supports limiting use of wood-burning fireplaces when the air is stagnant because the smoke "can choke people out." But people should also know that on most days, fireplace use is OK, he said.

Firewood dealers also lament that fly-by-night operations offer cheap wood to unsuspecting consumers. That cheaper wood is almost always green, they say, which produces more smoke when it burns.

Even air regulators suggest that fireplace users buy seasoned wood. Customers can tell whether wood is properly seasoned because it will weigh less, be cracked along the sides and will make a hollow sound when dropped on the ground, Headrick said.

It's not just firewood dealers who see the impact of the new rules. Smith said it also has an impact on orchard farmers, who may have a hard time finding firewood vendors to take dying trees.

The result is that many farmers may choose to burn their trees, worsening pollution because the wood won't have time to dry, Smith said.

Farmers are only allowed to burn debris on days with relatively clean air.

Companies that sell natural-gas fireplaces have seen a rise in sales since the rules were proposed nearly two years ago.

John Kelleher, a salesman at Ben's Appliance Lighthouse & Hearth in Lodi, said sales of natural-gas fireplaces have risen since the new rules were imposed.

The company's ads urge people to buy natural-gas fireplace inserts before the no-burn rules go into effect.

"This is really just the start. To us, it's just a matter of time before you can't burn wood at all," Kelleher said.

"It's definitely helped sales. But, hey, we didn't write the rules," he said.

A gas fireplace insert can cost anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

There are other alternatives for people who have wood-burning fireplaces but don't want much wood.

Manufactured logs can produce about two-thirds the emissions of regular wood, according to officials at Stockton-based Duraflame, the country's largest producer of manufactured logs.

For more information on the Valley's pollution, go to www.valleyair.org.

Prescribed burn rages on at former Fort Ord artillery range

The Associated Press

(Published in the Fresno Bee - Saturday, October 25, 2003, 10:40 AM)

SALINAS, Calif. (AP) - A prescribed burn at the former Fort Ord's artillery range was 85 percent contained a day after it burned out of control and scorched about 1,300 acres, more than twice what the Army planned.

Friday's planned burn was intended to clear 490 acres of brush, but by noon the blaze jumped fire lines and sent smoke and ash into the Monterey Peninsula air. No homes

were damaged and there were no injuries reported as fire officials began to gain control of the blaze late Friday.

The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District quickly issued a warning for people with respiratory and heart ailments to remain indoors with the windows shut.

"Fire is a difficult, unpredictable beast," said Rich Foster, a spokesman for Fire Stop, the private contractor hired to set the fire. "Today it's running. It got past the primary and secondary lines, and it is out of control."

Fort Ord fire officials and the California Department of Forestry took over the operation after the blaze spread and they hoped cooler temperatures and increased humidity heading into the weekend would bring the blaze under control.

Rudy bids farewell to council

Outgoing Visalia public servant receives thanks from colleagues before her move to Oregon.

By Tim Sheehan

The Fresno Bee

(Published Friday, October 24, 2003, 6:01 AM)

Wendy Rudy successfully avoided bursting into tears this week as she received a fond farewell from her colleagues on the Visalia City Council.

Rudy, elected to the council in November 1999 after serving on the Visalia Planning Commission, attended her final council meeting Monday before leaving to make a new home with her family in Oregon.

Rudy announced this year that she would not seek re-election to the council in November. Her departure comes just two weeks before her replacement will be selected by voters.

She cited health reasons, including [air pollution and asthma attacks](#), and being close to her mother, who owns a duplex in Oregon, as the rationale for moving there with her husband and two children.

Mayor Jesus Gamboa, Vice Mayor Bob Link and council members Don Landers and Phil Cox each offered a send-off message to Rudy as Monday's meeting began.

As Rudy nodded in agreement, Gamboa said she was leaving Visalia for [a place with better air](#) and less traffic. He then read a proclamation citing a long list of Rudy's accomplishments in the community, including her work as a medical corpsman in the military, her service on the Planning Commission and her term on the City Council.

Landers carried on a city tradition for departing council members and longtime employees by presenting Rudy with a street sign for "Rudy Road" and listing her years on the council.

Link noted that he was voted into office along with Rudy in the 1999 election before he presented her with a panel of artwork depicting several Visalia landmarks, including the "End of the Trail" statue in Mooney Grove Park and the Fox Theatre in downtown Visalia.

Cox, a longtime neighbor of Rudy's, said his family would miss her friendship "and our Fourth of July water fights." He acknowledged that they have not always agreed on issues as council members before presenting Rudy with a mounted sketch of a mural -- an issue on which the pair diverged in the past.

In a prepared statement she read at the meeting, Rudy expressed mixed emotions at leaving the city where she has lived since childhood.

"I have many wonderful memories and experiences that I will be taking with me," she said. "However, my greatest memory will be that of my time served as a City Council member.

"It has been a joy and an honor to serve the citizens of Visalia," she added. "There was never a dull moment. Four years flew by so fast. Many times, I felt as if I were on a roller coaster. ... Through it all, you, the citizens, were there for me, and I am forever grateful for that."

Rudy offered her thanks to her fellow council members, the city staffers, and to volunteers "for volunteering your time and money to support one of my many causes," including Visalia Emergency Aid, the Veterans Committee and Public Safety Day.

"Visalia is a better place because of you.

"I do feel the move is the best thing for me and my family," she added, "and I am confident Visalia will be just fine without me."

The reporter can be reached at tsheehan@fresnobee.com or 622-2410.

Opinion

New Apollo Project propels economy with clean energy

By Stephen Sacks

(Published in Fresno Bee - Saturday, October 25, 2003, 5:30 AM)

There is a famous quote that says in every crisis, there is opportunity. The crisis in this case is our dependence upon foreign oil and all the problems associated with it. Our opportunity is to become energy independent within the next 10 years as posited by the New Apollo Project for Energy Independence.

The original Apollo Project began in 1961 when President Kennedy stated that we would put a man on the moon within 10 years. This came to fruition in 1969, and I, like millions of other Americans, will never forget that incredible moment in history.

The New Apollo Project would consist of a partnership between labor, business and environmental organizations promoting a domestic investment strategy of \$300 billion. It would rebuild our obsolete energy infrastructure and develop a clean energy infrastructure primarily from solar, wind and hydrogen power.

This clean energy revolution would greatly expand our job base. That is why the United Auto Workers have endorsed this program. They know that with serious financial support from our government, we could transition to 100% hybrid and hydrogen fuel in the same

way that the government supported the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s and guaranteed the market for microchips in the 1960s.

One may ask where the money would come from. According to Michael Shellenberger, director of the New Apollo Project, this would not be a spending program but an investment program.

Again, as with the Interstate Highway System and the microchip revolution, the money spent on this new industry would more than pay for itself. It would stimulate American manufacturing, stimulate investment in new industry and would increase tax revenue through the creation of well-paying jobs and capital gains on investments.

Cannot afford it

For those who still think our government could not afford this type of investment, consider what has happened to tax revenue as corporations have influenced the government. We lose \$70 billion in potential revenue a year to offshore tax havens. Additionally, when oil is not imported, that money could be invested elsewhere.

Another consideration that at times is not factored into the equation is the effect that dirty air from burning coal and oil has on our health. If the 10% to 15% of students in Fresno no longer had asthma, there would be huge savings in health care and quality of life over the course of their lives. Almost twice as many Americans die annually from air pollution as die in traffic accidents at a financial cost in the billions of dollars.

The New Apollo Project would create long-lasting industry. We could manufacture solar panels for every house, as well as produce windmills and clean energy cars. We could begin domestically, then become exporters of clean energy products and technology throughout the world.

An important advantage of this clean energy revolution is that energy usage would become decentralized. With recent blackouts and price manipulations by oil and energy companies, we need a system that reduces the vulnerability of consumers. How many of us have felt victimized by utility energy price spikes and price increases at the gas pump?

Consider sky trains

A high quality of life is important to Americans, and one of the problems, especially in big cities, is that we spend too much time in our cars commuting to and from work. Developing a mass transit infrastructure and smarter cities would reduce commute times. In Fresno, there is a proposal for a Fresno Area Sky Train (F.A.S.T.). This is a high-speed monorail system served by a large fleet of shuttle buses so that one would never walk more than two blocks or wait more than 10-15 minutes. Their Web site points out that New York had elevated trains before its subway system when the population of Manhattan was about the same as Fresno's population today.

Support for the New Apollo Project is politically popular. A recent study of voters in Pennsylvania showed that 72% of the voters support this project. What's exciting is that this project is a win-win-win solution for business, labor and consumers.

Factories could reopen, workers could again make a middle-class wage and consumers could get products which would improve their lives. For more information, go to

www.apolloalliance.org <<http://www.apolloalliance.org>> and please share this information with your family and friends.

Breathe deeply: Chemistry hits us close to home

By George R. Kauffman

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National Chemistry Week is the American Chemical Society's outreach program, celebrated annually during the fourth week in October. Mayor Alan Autry declared Oct. 19-25 National Chemistry Week in Fresno.

This year's theme is "Earth's Atmosphere and Beyond." It emphasizes that chemistry occurs far beyond the laboratory and affects everyone, not only chemists.

The air we breathe contains 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen and 1% other gases by volume. Nitrogen is a crucial constituent of all plant and animal protein. Because the amino acids making up our bodies all contain nitrogen, without it there could be no life.

Yet, although we literally live in a sea of nitrogen (20 million tons over every square mile of the Earth's surface), most living cells cannot assimilate this vital element from the air to use for synthesizing proteins. Notable exceptions include certain bacteria that live in the root nodules of peas, beans, clover, alfalfa, soybeans and other legumes, which in crop rotation are cultivated to restore depleted nitrogen to the soil.

Haber's discovery

The problem of converting atmospheric nitrogen into compounds that can be used by plants (nitrogen fixation) was solved by German chemist Fritz Haber in 1909. With high pressure and a catalyst, he forced inactive nitrogen to combine with hydrogen to form ammonia, which could be converted into nitric acid or nitrates. All these compounds were used to prepare fertilizers, explosives and a host of industrial products.

Before Haber's discovery, nitrates and nitric acid were obtained from naturally occurring Chile saltpeter found in the arid Atacama Desert. (Nitrates are soluble and are not found in regions with appreciable rainfall). Despite the British Navy's blockade during World War I, Germany could meet her need for fertilizers and explosives by using Haber's process. Haber's award of the 1918 Nobel chemistry prize for this work was greeted with an international outcry, for he had introduced the use of chlorine as a poison gas during the conflict.

Although oxygen takes second place in the atmosphere's composition, it's the most abundant element in the Earth's crust and makes up about two thirds of our bodies by weight.

We are dependent on oxygen. Our mitochondria, the tiny intracellular structures that function as the power plants of cells, use it for energy. Antoine Laurent Lavoisier, the 18th-century French founder of modern chemistry, demonstrated that combustion and respiration both involved combination with oxygen -- oxidation -- the first rapid and the second slow.

The oxygen that we breathe must be continuously replenished. Plants do this by the process of photosynthesis. About half of all oxygen is produced by plants in tropical rain forests. Lumbering activities in these regions may limit the necessary oxygen on Earth. Without this symbiotic partnership between oxygen consumers (animals) and oxygen producers (plants) the atmospheric supply of oxygen would be depleted.

However, oxygen also exhibits a Janus-like face. In addition to being the element of life, it's also implicated in the aging process. Small amounts of oxygen in our cells form those pesky free radicals that attack brain, heart and muscles and can cause Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases, heart failure and muscle wasting.

[Ozone, good or bad?](#)

And what of ozone, oxygen's smelly cousin, which contains three atoms in its molecule compared to oxygen's two? Good or bad? It all depends. When American chemist Thomas Midgley, Jr. introduced chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as cheap, stable, nontoxic, nonflammable refrigerants in 1937, they were quickly adopted not only for this purpose but also as aerosol propellants, solvents and cleaners for electronic equipment.

However, they proved to have unforeseen environmental consequences. In the early 1970s, scientists found the chemical inertness that made them commercially useful allows them to remain in the troposphere for 40-150 years. Here they are broken down by sunlight to release chlorine atoms that gobble up the ozone layer, our planet's protective ultraviolet sunscreen, resulting in increased skin cancer and global warming. The 1987 Montreal Protocol restricts the release of human-made ozone-destroying gases.

[Yet, at lower altitudes, ozone is the principal villain in the summer smog that makes the San Joaquin Valley our nation's second most polluted region. The Bee's thought-provoking editorial series "Last Gasp" has made us aware of this problem.](#)

Unlike many other human activities, science is a continually advancing, self-correcting endeavor that constantly balances benefit and risk. When it inadvertently causes unintended consequences, scientists strive to correct them.

As the late Nobel laureate Linus Pauling told my wife Laurie and me in one of his last interviews, "We ought to be smart enough, we human beings, to solve our problems, whatever they are."

'Send the buses'

By Liz Pianetta

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State roadwork is delayed and the Fresno State plan is criticized. As Bee writer Jim Steinberg's article [Oct. 21] warns, "All the traffic models and planning cannot predict real traffic for real events."

[The air quality in the Valley is bad, bad, bad, and we should be very worried about thousands of cars gridlocked on Highway 168 and snarled on surface streets surrounding the Save Mart Center.](#)

An aggressive mass transit plan could effectively handle Save Mart Center events. Buses loading from remote locations, Save Mart stores and downtown or outlying parking areas, for example, could be fast tracked to and from the venue. Save wear and tear on the autos, the air and our nerves. Send the buses, we will come.