

Input sought on burn limits

Home wood-burning would be banned on worst air days in cold weather.

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

(Published Tuesday, December 3, 2002, 7:10 AM)

Tracie Douglas remembers an uproar in the early 1990s when authorities started enforcing "no-burn" days for Reno-area residents who used fireplaces.

Even though fireplace smoke sometimes left the Nevada city in a sooty haze, people complained about the government intruding into their lives.

"I was eaten alive," said Douglas, spokeswoman for the Washoe County District Health Department Air Quality Management Division in Reno.

"People here are pretty independent. But they adjusted. We haven't written a citation here in eight years."

Residents in the San Joaquin Valley, one of the nation's worst places for soot and small-particle pollution, will face the same adjustment a year from now when the government decides when to allow burning.

At 6:30 p.m. today, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District wants to hear what residents think during a public workshop at district headquarters on Gettysburg Avenue.

The district will unveil a rule to ban residential wood-burning on the Valley's worst air days in cold weather. Officials would call a no-burn day five to 20 times a year in the Valley, which is home to 605,000 wood-burning fireplaces, stoves and inserts.

In metropolitan areas of the Valley, residential burning accounts for 30% of the particle pollution from November to February.

The federal government requires the no-burn rule because the Valley missed cleanup deadlines for particle pollution. Such pollution is linked to premature death, chronic bronchitis and other lung problems.

On Monday, officials released a list of proposals in the rule, including a ban on wood-burning devices and fireplaces in new Valley subdivisions. Natural gas heating devices would be allowed.

In addition, when houses are sold, homeowners would be required to permanently disable or remove wood-burning stoves or inserts that are not federally certified.

The district's proposal didn't mention enforcement or fines.

"Enforcement is still up in the air, and we would like to hear from the public about it," said senior air quality planner Tom Jordan.

"We don't want to send inspectors to people's doors. We would probably mail a warning or a notice of violation to people."

Fines would be levied against repeat offenders. Jordan didn't want to speculate on how much the fines would be, but he said they would probably be more than \$50 but not as high as \$500.

To find offenders, the district might have inspectors search residential areas. Officials may also encourage neighbors to call the district if they see an illegal burn.

Burning bans would occur when district meteorologists forecast unhealthy conditions for the next day.

The district uses the "air quality index," a 0-to-300 scale that reflects weather, pollutants and other factors. The higher the number, the worse the air quality.

For predictions between 150 and 170, people would have to stop burning wood in fireplaces or heaters.

Federally certified or pellet-fueled wood heaters would still be allowed to burn.

When the index goes above 170, all wood burning would be banned.

The district rule would exclude wood-burning residences with no other source of heating, dwellings above 3,000 feet in the foothills and housing units where no natural gas or propane service is available.

The reporter can be reached at mgrossi@fresnobee.com or 441-6316.

Editorial--Fresno Bee

Put out the fires

Air district must take a small step toward reducing fireplace pollution.

(Published Tuesday, December 3, 2002, 7:25 AM)

The process that will lead to restrictions on the burning of wood in fireplaces in the San Joaquin Valley begins tonight with a public workshop. The proposal, which is required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is a modest step considering that the Valley has one of the worst air basins in the country.

Given the growing health risks of merely breathing the Valley's air, it's time for significant action after a generation of ignoring the problem.

The fireplace rules that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is proposing will be discussed at 6:30 tonight at the district office in Fresno, 1990 Gettysburg Ave. You should participate. If the district does not take this action by September 2003, it could lead to EPA sanctions that would include fees on new or expanding businesses and a freeze on federal road-building funds.

Under the proposal, the district would begin next winter to regulate fireplace burning during episodes of bad air, and repeat offenders could be fined. Air district officials say the no-burn rule could be imposed on five to 20 nights a year, depending on the weather.

The restrictions are voluntary right now, but few Valley residents heed the call to forgo fireplace burning when air district officials ask them. Clearly, an outright ban is needed, as well as prohibiting the building of wood-burning fireplaces in new homes constructed in the Valley.

The amount of soot and ash pollution in the Valley is among the worst in the nation. Health officials say soot and ash can trigger asthma attacks and other lung problems. This type of pollution also has been linked to higher death rates and heart problems.

About 30% of the wintertime soot and ash around Valley cities come from residents burning wood in their fireplaces.

If we really want to clean the Valley's air -- and protect our health -- we would voluntarily stop burning wood in our fireplaces altogether. That would be a step for a healthier future.

Meetings for fireplace proposal set for this week

Monday December 02, 2002, 10:46:14 PM
The Bakersfield Californian

A plan to restrict fireplace use in the San Joaquin Valley will get its first public airing at three meetings this week.

The rules are intended to reduce harmful levels of wood smoke pollution on winter nights when weather conditions cause an inversion layer that traps smoke near the ground. This smoke can cause asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and even cancer.

For Kern County residents, the most convenient meeting is in Bakersfield at 2 p.m. Wednesday at 2700 M St., Suite 275.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is proposing mandatory restrictions on wood-burning under certain weather conditions. A two-tier restriction is proposed: Less severe cases would allow wood burning in EPA-certified wood stoves, while worst cases would ban all wood burning. The restrictions, expected to occur 20 times per year, would be enforced by a telephone tip line and follow-up visits by air district personnel. Exemptions may be allowed for people entirely dependent on wood to heat their homes, areas where no natural gas service is available, and above the 3,000-foot elevation.

The proposal also calls for allowing only one wood-burning appliance per acre in new housing developments, no matter how many homes are built per acre. There would be no limit on appliances that burn only natural gas or propane. Also, the air district may require older, non-certified woodstoves to be removed or replaced when existing homes are sold.

Two other meetings will be held on the proposal, and the public may attend in person or by videoconference in Bakersfield. These are at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in Fresno, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.; and at 1:30 p.m. Thursday in Modesto, 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130.

Comments may also be submitted by writing to Tom Jordan, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave, Fresno, 93726, or e-mail tom.jordan@valleyair.org.

For more information, call 326-6900 or visit www.valleyair.org/Workshops/public_workshops_idx.htm.

Editorial

Growth? What, me worry?

Monday December 02, 2002, 10:50:05 PM, Bakersfield Californian

When it comes to "smart growth," it's easier to talk it than do it. Facing a population increase of about 6 million people per decade, Californians are quick to bemoan their increasingly clogged highways, polluted air and scarce government services.

Short of sealing up California's borders preventing new residents from moving to the state and imposing birth control measures, the principles of "smart growth" seem to roll off most people's lips.

These principles include adopting stricter land-use policies, forcing housing and other developments into existing urban areas, blocking sprawl that consumes farm land and developing higher-density housing build up and build closer together. Discourage Californians from using their cars. Promote mass transit.

Yes sir, that's "smart growth." And everyone seems to be "for it," until it applies to them.

A survey released recently by the Public Policy Institute of California revealed Californians really are not interested in changing their land-consuming, gas-guzzling ways to accommodate "smart growth." It may be OK for the guy next door, but they are not interested in living in shoebox homes on tiny lots and taking the bus to work.

They want low-density neighborhoods. They are willing to commute to work. Just get those other cars off the road, will ya?

They aren't even really interested in the basic "smart growth concept" of forcing new development into existing, already developed areas.

So, what's a smart-growther to do? Convince local government elected officials to buck popular sentiment and impose slow-growth restrictions? That would be the day.

How about convincing local and state elected officials that it is time for them to lead instead of chasing the campaign bucks extended by pro-growth development interests.

Leadership means carrying unpopular messages to the populace. It means acknowledging and explaining to their constituents the costs of growth the tax dollars needed to extend government services and the impact growth has on the quality of life. It means creating incentives for citizens to make sacrifices that will benefit the entire community. It means balancing a community's need to grow with the need to grow wisely in some cases, more slowly.

California is erupting at its population seams. This is particularly true of the Central Valley, where land is relatively cheap and plentiful. This growth has serious health, environmental and economic consequences.

The PPIC survey made it clear: Californians want the quality of life smart growth principles promise, but they do not want to make the personal sacrifices needed to achieve a good quality of life.

It is up to state and local elected officials to exert leadership and make the tough decisions needed to provide Californians with a good living environment in the many years ahead.

Letters to the Editor, Fresno Bee

Rules of the road

By Paul Volker

Fresno

(Published Tuesday, December 3, 2002, 6:00 AM)

Why large SUVs? For some it's a simple matter of complying with government regulations. My son and daughter-in-law recently traded their midsize V-6 for a V-8 Suburban delivering about one-half the fuel mileage.

Why? Two children under the age of 2 years. With all the equipment required by law to make the journey to Grandma's house, plus the other stuff that goes with transporting little ones, you can hardly do it in anything smaller.