

## **Burning question: Will you get fined? No-burn violators will be notified by mail.**

By Mark Grossi  
The Fresno Bee

*(Published Wednesday, November 19, 2003, 5:40 AM)*

Even though local air authorities ordered you not to light your fireplace Tuesday, you burned your wood anyway. It was a chilly November evening. But did you get caught?

The answer: You don't know.

You won't find out for a few days because inspectors for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District don't knock on doors. They mail violation notices.

So when the district issued its first wood-burning ban Tuesday, inspectors cruised neighborhoods, but they didn't actually speak with possible offenders.

"That's too invasive," said Bob Kard, director of the district's compliance department. "We look for smoke, take photographs and contact the resident via mail."

Don't look for the inspectors today. District officials called for only voluntary burning reductions from residents in Fresno, Stanislaus, Tulare and Kern counties. The air is not fouled enough to call a mandatory no-burn day.

But the air was unhealthy enough Tuesday in Fresno and Kern counties for the air district to implement the no-burn rule.

About 60 district employees hit the streets at various times during the day and evening Tuesday in Fresno and Kern counties to look for houses where wood was burning in a fireplace, stove or heater.

The inspectors are investigating other air issues, visiting dry cleaners, petroleum businesses, car painting shops and others to make sure rules are being followed. They schedule time, along with their other duties, to drive through neighborhoods during the day and evening hours.

By late afternoon, officials had reported 14 violations in Fresno County and five in Kern County. Resident complaints resulted in 10 of the Fresno County violations and all of those in Kern County.

"We will investigate calls from citizens," Kard said. "We will write notices of violation if we find evidence of it."

Because the violation notices are mailed, the district doesn't allow the media to ride along with inspectors. The media would be publicizing the violation before the resident even knew about it, officials explained.

"People have to know they're going to get a notice of violation before the media puts it out to the public," said spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello.

The fine can range from \$50 to \$1,000 for violations.

If a wood-burning device is the sole source of heat for the home, however, the resident is exempted from the ban. In some areas, people have no access to natural gas delivery, so they are exempted.

Information about the wood-burning program can be obtained from the district at (800) 766-4463. Complaints may be submitted at (800) 870-1037 or by checking [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) <<http://www.valleyair.org>>.

## **Poor air quality stalls wood burning**

By Cynthia J. Wright, staff writer

Published in the Selma Enterprise, Kingsburg Recorder and Twin City Times, Nov. 19, 2003

New local wood burning restrictions have some valley residents confused, and others just angry. Some valley newspaper editorial sections have compared the new restrictions to Nazi Germany and "Big Brother."

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued its first request on Thursday for voluntary wood burning curtailment since the program began on Nov. 1. Monday was another voluntary curtailment day, followed by the first mandatory prohibition day on Tuesday.

The restrictions are part of the new wood-burning program established by the Air District to reduce air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley area. While these restrictions didn't apply to all of the eight counties that fall under this new program, all three of the restrictions issued so far have included Fresno County.

Some valley residents feel this new program is an infringement on their freedom. Others believe it is a necessary step in moving the valley toward healthier air.

The comparison to Big Brother comes from the Air District's provision of a phone number for citizens to call to report violations, which implies people are to report on their neighbors.

In a letter to the editor in the Nov. 4 issue of the Bakersfield Californian, Dawn E. Woltz of Bakersfield suggested, "This smacks of the days when the Nazi's encouraged Europeans to turn against their Jewish neighbors."

The majority opinion being reported in local papers, however, seems to agree that air quality in the valley is a problem and that serious measures need to be taken. It also seems to be the general consensus, once one truly understands the situation, that restrictions on burning wood are a small sacrifice to make for better air quality.

The situation, according to the Air District, is that air quality in the San Joaquin Valley is among the poorest in California.

Wood burned in residential fireplaces causes large amounts of particulate matter (tiny bits of soot, ash and other material) to be released into the air. This contributes to about 30 percent of wintertime air pollution in the valley, according to the Air District.

It is estimated that the valley gets up to 24 tons a day of soot and ash from residential wood-burning in the winter, according to air pollution officials. Fog adds to the problem by suspending particulates in the air for days.

High levels of particulate matter can lead to serious health problems including asthma attacks, respiratory distress and, in extreme cases, heart attacks. The valley's asthma rate far exceeds the national rate. In fact, people relocating to the valley are frequently told, if they didn't have respiratory problems before, they will after being here a while.

Plainly stated, there are three levels in the wood-burning curtailment program.

No restrictions: When air quality is good to moderate (0-100 on the Air Quality Index);

Voluntary restrictions: When air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups (101-150 on the AQI); and

Mandatory curtailment: When air quality is unhealthy for everyone (above 150 on the AQI). At this point, all solid-fuel burning, including pellets and manufactured fire logs, is prohibited upon penalty of fines.

These restrictions don't apply to those who burn wood as their only source of heat, nor do they apply to devices used above 3,000 feet in elevation and in areas where natural gas is not available.

Restrictions will be applied on a county by county basis in the eight-county Air District. Each county's air quality index, the AQI rating that ranges from zero to 300, will be used to trigger the burning restriction. Kern and Fresno counties, which are bothered most by particulate air pollution, will likely be the most affected.

The valley's air pollution problems cannot be directed at any one source, according to the Air District's spokesperson Josette Merced Bello. Bad air is created by a combination of combustion engines, industrial processes, wood-burning and warm weather.

According to Bello, valley residents have to endure different types of air problems at different times of the year. Smog, also known as ground level ozone, tends to be more prevalent during the summer months, and particulate

matter from wind blown dust and wood-burning devices are a problem in the winter.

There are some things valley residents can do to improve the situation. The valley district's website provides the following clean-burning tips:

- n Ensure firewood is clean, seasoned and dry before burning it. Unseasoned wood smolders and creates additional emissions.

- n Never burn trash, magazines, newspapers, plastics or other materials not designed to burn in fireplaces or stoves. Doing so is illegal and hazardous.

- n Replace old solid fuel-burning equipment with cleaner EPA Phase II-certified or pellet-fueled devices. Or install natural gas or propane devices, which are not subject to Air District wood-burning rules.

- n For an ambiance fire in an open fireplace, a manufactured fire log may be a cleaner alternative to wood.

The air quality and burn restrictions will be announced through newspaper, television and radio reports, as well as on the Air District's website ([www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org)) or by calling (800) SMOG INF. Those who burn on no burn days can be reported through the website or by calling (800) 926-5550.

## **Valley air district monitors burning**

By Michelle Terwilleger, Californian staff writer

The Bakersfield Californian

Posted: Tuesday November 18th, 2003, 10:25 PM

Last Updated: Tuesday November 18th, 2003, 11:03 PM

If you burned wood in your fireplace on Tuesday, you broke the law.

It was the first day the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District had power to enforce the temporary ban on the use of fireplaces and wood stoves in Kern and Fresno counties.

The ban is not in effect today, but the district is recommending against wood burning.

Late in the day, the district was investigating five citizen complaints in Kern County. But first-time violators can breathe easy -- they'll only receive letters informing them that they broke the new rule.

First-time violators will not receive a fine unless they are caught with smoke in their chimney again on a no fireplace/woodstove day. The fines start at \$50 and can increase up to \$1,000 with multiple violations, Clarke said.

"We're not going to fine anybody unless we actually see it ... observe smoke coming from the chimney," said Wayne Clarke, compliance manager for the Fresno office of the air district.

District inspectors were expected to spend at least one hour Tuesday looking for chimney smoke and to document burning with photographs.

Residents who receive the letters will have an opportunity to apply for an exemption if their home contains no other heat source, if they do not have access to natural gas service or if they live at elevations above 3,000 feet.

District officials said they only want to provide exemptions to people who have been contacted by the agency rather than exempting people in advance.

The ban allows the air district to issue mandatory wood-burning restrictions from Nov. 1 to Feb. 28 in areas where air quality is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive groups on certain days. The restriction lasts from midnight to midnight.

The rule has been debated among valley residents, with some arguing it will have little effect on the air quality and that the ban is a violation of property rights.

Others support it with the hope that both the environment and human health will improve.

"I think pollution is more important than the comfort of my home," said Gerry Collis, who lives in northeast Bakersfield. "If everybody does what they want, pollution is going to get worse."

Jerry Youngblood is having a house built in northwest Bakersfield and chose not to get a fireplace because he believes wood burning will eventually be banned altogether.

"We don't need it here," Youngblood said. "We've got enough smog."

Steve Choate said he didn't think the ban would help air quality very much and likes to use his fireplace to prevent his gas bill from getting too high. But he said he will comply with the rule.

Residents can check daily wood-burning status by following media reports, calling the air district at (800) SMOG-INFO or (800) 766-4463, or on the Web: [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Central Valley issues burn ban; EPA returns air program to state**

By Brian Skoloff, Associated Press Writer

Published in The Bakersfield Californian

Posted: Monday November 17th, 2003, 6:15 PM

Last Updated: Tuesday November 18th, 2003, 12:30 AM

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) - In a first of its kind announcement, San Joaquin Valley air regulators said on Tuesday they will enforce a ban that prohibits thousands of residents from lighting up their fireplaces and wood-burning stoves.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said the burn ban, the first mandatory restriction since new rules took effect Nov. 1, applies to residents living in the valley portions of Kern and Fresno counties. It covers pellet stoves as well as wood-burning fireplaces.

Violators can be fined \$50 to \$1,000, district spokeswoman Josette Merced Bello said Monday.

Despite some public objections, regulators enacted the burn ban to control particle pollution in a region deemed to have the nation's second-worst air quality. The point is to limit the microscopic bits of dust, soot and smoke which environmental groups blame for hundreds of deaths a year in the valley.

Regulators announce bans based on an index that rates air quality from zero to more than 300. When the index hits 100, residents are asked to stop burning voluntarily - as is the case Tuesday in Stanislaus County.

The mandatory ban comes when the index surpasses 150. Houses above 3,000 feet and residents who rely on wood for heat are exempt, as are households which live in areas without natural gas service.

"The bans are based somewhat on weather, stagnate conditions, pressure and fog. All of those things help to trap the particles in the valley," Merced Bello said. "Typically, what we see during the winter is a build-up."

Also Monday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced it has returned to California control of an air pollution program that ended the agriculture industry's decades-long exemption from clean air laws.

The EPA handed over control of the program, which forces farm polluters to apply for permits, late last week.

The move to give the state control over the permitting program became possible after former Gov. Gray Davis signed legislation in September to reduce valley air pollution. State officials estimate farms account for as much as 20 percent of the smog-producing gases in the region.

The legislation, which takes effect Jan. 1, forces farm polluters to comply with the federal Clean Air Act by applying for air quality permits. California farms had been exempt from the federal regulation for more than 25 years because the state didn't require such permits.

The EPA began administering the permit program in October 2002 to settle a lawsuit with environmental groups which wanted the agency to enforce its own Clean Air Act requirements.

"We believe permitting is best implemented at the local level," said Wayne Nastri, EPA's Pacific Southwest regional administrator. "Returning the program to the state will allow us all to focus our efforts on improving California's air quality."

## **No-burn day in Fresno County**

The Hanford Sentinel, Nov. 18, 2003

FRESNO - A mandatory fireplace restriction has been issued for today in Fresno and portions of Kern counties. There were no restrictions planned for residents of Kings County.

All Fresno County residents are prohibited from burning any wood, artificial firelogs or pellets. Voluntary restrictions are issued for residents of Tulare and Stanislaus counties.

## **Voluntary 'no burn' request issued**

Turlock Journal, Nov. 18, 2003

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](http://www.valleyair.org).

[Letter to The Fresno Bee, Nov. 19, 2003:](#)

## **Can't rely on buses**

By David Bockoven, Fresno

*(Published Wednesday, November 19, 2003, 5:45 AM)*

Riding the bus to [spare the air](#) has been in the news. For some folks, it's necessity. On Veterans Day, I chose the buses for an afternoon appointment. They are pleasant.

I had wanted to write to celebrate the rain-washed air. For a weekend movie, I was able to enjoy the 35-minute walk to a theater, and luxuriate in the clean fall air. But apart from three teenagers who gave me a pleasant greeting, I was lonely for a sense of community. A lovely fall day, sidewalks safe and clean, an epidemic of obesity and still people were locked in their cars, making exhaust. How sad.

Bus hours are limited. On weekends the last run is early, so the buses won't get us home from a movie.

Veterans Day is the kind of holiday on which buses use a weekend schedule. To attend a ceremony in his honor, a disabled American vet in reduced circumstances is unable to get there on some routes before 11 a.m., and would have to leave before 4:30 p.m. (On holidays such as July 4th and Christmas there is no bus service at all.)

After the absence of an evening bus surprised me on Veterans Day, I was proud to be tough enough to walk home. I suppose the disabled vet in reduced circumstances got a ride from a friend. I hope.

The irony was that I had been to the foot doctor. It wasn't even a holiday there.

The lesson is, ordinary people couldn't rely on the bus to get to work.