

New wood-burning restrictions begin Nov.1

From staff reports - Turlock Journal, October 14, 2003

As overnight temperatures dip into the 30s and 40s, the thought of snuggling up in front of a roaring fire can seem more and more appealing.

However, new wood-burning restrictions set to take effect in less than three weeks may put a damper on some people's plans.

The regulations, which go into effect on Nov. 1, are designed to reduce fall and wintertime air pollution caused by wood-burning fireplaces, stoves and inserts.

For the first time in the San Joaquin Valley, residents in affected counties - including Stanislaus - will be prohibited from burning solid fuels such as wood, manufactured firelogs and pellets when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy - an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher.

In addition to Stanislaus, the new restrictions apply to Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings, Stanislaus, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties.

The restrictions will be issued county-by-county depending on local air quality conditions. When a restriction is issued, it will be in effect for 24 hours - from midnight to midnight.

"We're looking at wood-burning restrictions being in effect for the first time," said Anthony Presto, public education representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, which is charged with cleaning up the air from Bakersfield to Stockton.

"We're taking every measure that's possible to perform what we have been charged with," said Presto.

And that means cleaning up the air.

Last year, the restrictions were instituted on a voluntary basis; however this winter it's mandatory.

Based on historical data, wood-burning restrictions likely will affect Stanislaus County on about six days between Nov. 1 and Feb. 28.

During the cooler weather, when chimney smoke meets the Valley's chilly fog, ground level air cools and slides down onto the valley floors, trapping smoke and other air pollution close to the ground.

Presto said the winter pollution caused by burning wood is completely different from the smog that is prevalent in the Valley during the summer. This pollution comes in part from vehicle emissions, and is compounded by sunlight and heat.

Wood smoke accounts for about one-third of particulate matter - or PM10 - in the air; the remaining two-thirds comes from agriculture and industry, which are already being regulated by the air district.

Compliance with a "no burn" request when air quality is at its worst has been voluntary for the last decade, according to Presto. However last year, the Environmental Protection Agency, "said it wasn't good enough."

"The EPA said we have to take another stance that's going to be an actual rule," he added.

Currently, the Valley's air is classified as being in "severe" non-compliance with federal clean air

standards and if the situation doesn't improve by 2005, federal sanctions could take effect, including losses of highway funding.

Presto said that people often get aggravated with the different regulations and ask, "Why are you going after the little guy?"

"We're looking at every aspect of air pollution," he said. "Wood smoke is serious in that it provides 24 tons a day of particulate matter during the (winter) season.

"It's serious and cannot be ignored... Everybody has to cooperate, it's everybody's job."

What this means

Beginning Nov. 1, residents can find their county's daily wood-burning status by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO or logging onto www.valleyair.org.

While most residences and businesses - including lodges and restaurants - are subject to the prohibitions, exemptions apply to gas and propane devices or wood-burning cooking stoves; homes in which wood burning is the sole source of heat; devices used above 3,000 feet in elevation; and areas where natural gas service is not available.

Air district inspectors will perform surveillance and investigate complaints. Violations of the wood-burning prohibitions can result in fines.

In order to prevent the need for mandatory restrictions, the air district will notify the public when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive groups (an Air Quality Index of 101 to 150).

At that level, residents are asked to voluntarily refrain from burning solid fuels such as wood, manufactured firelogs or pellets. If air quality continues to deteriorate, the district will then issue mandatory restrictions.

In addition to checking air quality conditions before lighting fires, residents can reduce air pollution caused by their wood fires by following these tips:

- Burn only seasoned firewood in fireplaces or wood stoves. Green wood smolders and creates additional emissions.
- Never burn trash, magazines, newspapers, plastics or other materials not designed to burn in a fireplace or stove. Doing so is illegal and hazardous.
- For an ambiance fire in an open fireplace, a manufactured fire log may be a cleaner alternative to wood.
- Replace old wood-burning equipment with efficient gas- or propane-fueled devices. These devices are not subject to Air District wood-burning rules. Or, consider installing EPA Phase II-certified woodstoves or inserts or pellet heaters. These are cleaner and more efficient heaters than open hearths and older, non-certified equipment.
- Burn denser woods. They take longer to ignite, but burn slower and more evenly.
- Keep fireplaces and wood stoves properly maintained. Chimneys should be cleaned and inspected periodically.

For more information, visit the air district's Web site at www.valleyair.org. To report violations, call 1-800-281-7003.

[Turlock Journal Editorial, October 14, 2003:](#)

When air quality is bad, just say no

Everybody contributes to air pollution in some way, whether by driving a vehicle, or using an aerosol spray can or a chemical that emits noxious fumes.

While the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District urges less highway driving during "spare the air" days in the summer, the agency is now cracking down on another polluter - wood burning.

This "other second hand smoke" is in fact more carcinogenic than equal volumes from tobacco, and for those with sensitive airways amounts to tiny daggers piercing tissue in the deepest recesses of the lungs.

The particulate matter, known as PM10, is microscopic and 100 times smaller than a single grain of table salt - and it emanates from residential chimneys. It's carbon monoxide (the poisonous stuff that comes out of a car's exhaust) and formaldehyde (the stuff funeral directors use in embalming). Then there's an unhealthy dose of organic gases and nitrogen oxides.

We acknowledge that there are those people who have to burn wood as it's their only source of heat. We don't have a beef with them.

However, there are those who use other sources of energy to heat their homes, and simply enjoy the coziness of a big roaring fire crackling in the fireplace.

In February of this year, the Environmental Protection Agency ruled that the voluntary "Please don't light tonight" provisions do not fully comply with Clean Air Act requirements for the control of residential wood burning, so they've put their foot down.

From Nov. 1 through Feb. 28, there will be mandatory no-burn days when airborne particulates reach unhealthy levels; limits on the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new housing developments; and required retrofit or retirement of non-certified wood-burning equipment upon the sale of existing homes.

Our air is already considered to be in "serious" non-attainment of federal health standards when it comes to fine airborne particulate matter. The air district says residential fireplaces and stoves contribute about 30 percent of the Valley's winter air pollution.

Now that the more stringent regulations are about to be enforced, we hope the air district does just that - penalizes those who defy the "no burn" ban when it is activated.

We will be doing our part to publicize these bad air days by placing an alert on the bottom of the front page when the midnight-to-midnight ban is in force.

There's a lot at stake - the health of every man, woman and child who calls the Valley their home.

[Fresno Bee Letter to the Editor:](#)

Bus service must get much better before people will ride

By D.R. Stiers
Clovis

(Published Monday, October 13, 2003, 5:22 AM)

This is in response to Bryan Apper (letter Oct. 9): I am glad the mayor and City Council had the

time to ride the bus to work. My husband would have liked to do this, but it was not possible. The 15-minute drive to downtown would have taken him two-and-a-half hours. Since he has a real life, children and a job, riding the bus was not an option.

I encourage the city to re-look at the buses and how they transport people. Even the five- to 10-minute drive to California State University, Fresno, from my house turns into a 45-minute activity when riding the bus. Of course, it is longer when the bus does not show up.

It is amazing to me that a place as busy as Fresno State has buses running by it only every half hour. Maybe new bus routes that include places people want to go at the times people need, and the ability to get the people there in a reasonable amount of time, might encourage ridership, not just lip service.