

## **Woodstove retrofit rule kicks in today**

The Bakersfield Californian

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Starting today, homeowners who heat with wood will have one more thing to fret about when it's time to sell the house. The new valley-wide rule that bans wood burning on polluted winter nights also requires homeowners to remove or disable older woodstoves when they sell a home.

This piece of the rule -- overlooked by many amid the controversy of the burn ban -- is now causing worries among sellers and real estate agents. It could be expensive for some home sellers, but compliance is pretty simple.

Basically, woodstoves or fireplace inserts built before July 1, 1990, must be removed or disabled before the home is sold. Sellers are required to sign a declaration during the escrow process stating that they have done so.

Open-hearth masonry fireplaces do not have to be removed or modified in any way. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District decided the traditional fireplace is not a heating device, and therefore is used only on special occasions.

The point of the rule is to slowly phase out the worst-polluting woodstoves. On all but the worst winter nights, wood burning is still allowed, but there are thousands of older stoves and inserts in use that pollute much more than newer models. Soot and gases from these older devices can cause a host of health problems, from breathing trouble, asthma and lung damage to heart disease.

"The San Joaquin Valley already has some of the worst wintertime air quality in the entire country," said Kelly Hogan Malay, air district spokeswoman. "Reducing particulate emissions from residential wood burning is very important to achieving the goal of clean air."

Residential wood burning is a small part of the valley's annual pollution problem. But on certain winter nights, it causes up to 30 percent of urban particulate pollution. These also happen to be the nights when the valley violates federal health standards for particulate pollution.

But real estate professionals are wringing their hands over the rule. For one thing, it will cost homeowners money, from paying a chimney sweep just to pull out and inspect an older fireplace insert, on up to replacing an older woodstove with a new model.

"That's one more piece of paper for us and the home sellers," said Greg Hanvey, general manager of The Touchstone Real Estate Group and a board member of the Bakersfield Board of Realtors. "There's also a responsibility on agents to make sure they're in compliance, and we don't like that because now we've become fireplace inspectors."

But the air district says property owners are liable, not their agents. A copy of each compliance form gets filed with the air district, and if violations are discovered -- even years later -- that property owner could be subject to fines and a compliance order.

Also, if the selling property owner removes the offending woodstove and puts it in the garage, and the new owner reinstalls it, the new owner could be punished.

There are ways a noncompliant woodstove can be left in the home and "rendered inoperable." If the woodstove doors are discarded and the hinges destroyed, the unit can still be used just like an open-hearth fireplace, said Wayne Clarke, air district compliance manager.

"Antique" woodstoves can also be kept as decorative items if the flue opening is permanently plugged or if holes are drilled in the firebox, Clarke said.

## **Restrictions will limit fireplaces in Central Valley Change could mean higher local home costs**

The Associated Press

Published in the Tulare Advance-Register

January 1, 2004

FRESNO -- New restrictions in effect today will limit the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new homes in the Valley, a change that may mean higher costs for homebuyers.

Officials said the measures, which would also prohibit conventional fireplaces from being built in certain subdivisions, is part of a larger plan to clean the Valley's air of particle pollution, tiny bits of soot and dust that can lodge in people's lungs and cause health problems.

The new rules established by the Valley Air Board require the seller of any Valley home to certify that the wood-burning devices in the dwelling are either open-hearth fireplaces, pellet-fueled heaters or an Environmental Protection Agency-certified fireplace insert or stove. The restrictions also limit the number of wood-burning devices allowed in homes. In a development with more than two homes per acre, for example, no open-hearth fireplaces would be allowed.

Robert Wood, president of Generation Homes Inc., a Fresno-based builder, predicted that most modestly priced homes in the Valley will now likely be built without fireplaces, whereas before the new restrictions, fireplaces were typical.

"If you really wanted a wood-burning fireplace, you'd have to go to an EPA-certified system, and I think you're looking at a minimum of probably \$3,000, compared to about \$500 before," Wood said.

## **Central Valley curbs residential fireplaces to cut air pollution**

By Brian Skoloff

Associated Press

Published in the Merced Sun-Star

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

FRESNO - New restrictions set to go into effect Thursday will limit the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new homes in the San Joaquin Valley, a change that may mean higher costs for local home buyers.

Officials said the measures, which would also prohibit conventional fireplaces from being built in certain subdivisions, is part of a larger plan to clean the valley's air of particle pollution, tiny bits of soot and dust that can lodge in people's lungs and cause health problems.

Fresno County has the highest childhood asthma rate in the state and the San Joaquin Valley is considered to be the second dirtiest air basin in the nation outside of Los Angeles.

Particle pollution is worst during the winter months when residents use fireplaces often, air officials said.

The new rules require the seller of any valley home to certify that the wood-burning devices in the dwelling are either open-hearth fireplaces, pellet-fueled heaters or an Environmental Protection Agency-certified fireplace insert or stove.

The restrictions also limit the number of wood-burning devices allowed in homes. In a development with more than two homes per acre, for example, no open-hearth fireplaces would be allowed.

"It will drastically reduce wintertime particle pollution in the valley's air," said Janis Parker, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Parker said about half of the representatives from the valley's building community supported the restrictions. Opponents argued the change would drive up real estate prices.

Robert Wood, president of Generation Homes, Inc., a Fresno-based builder, predicted that most modestly priced homes in the valley will now likely be built without fireplaces, whereas before the new restrictions, fireplaces were typically standard.

"If you really wanted a wood-burning fireplace, you'd have to go to an EPA-certified system, and I think you're looking at a minimum of probably \$3,000, compared to about \$500 before," Wood said.

(Note: Air District staff have notified The Fresno Bee that the article below contains incorrect information about exemptions to the change-out requirement and a correction has been requested.)

### **Air rule paperwork goes into effect**

#### **Wood stoves, fireplaces in home sales covered.**

By Russell Clemings

The Fresno Bee

(Published Friday, January 2, 2004, 5:37 AM)

Add one more piece of paper to that stack everyone faces when buying or selling a house.

A rule that went into effect Thursday requires sellers of homes heated by wood stoves or wood-burning fireplace inserts to sign a statement averring that their equipment meets federal air pollution standards -- or, if it doesn't, that they have removed it from the property or made it permanently inoperable.

The new rule is just the latest wrinkle in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's efforts to reduce winter levels of soot and other small particles. Its requirement that noncomplying devices be removed or disabled will affect most stoves and fireplace inserts sold in the Valley before July 1, 1990.

Sellers who have open-hearth fireplaces, pellet stoves and wood-burning cook stoves will have to file similar statements to affirm that they don't have the type of stove or insert that is covered by the new rule.

But in both cases, there are exceptions for homes that are higher than 3,000 feet in elevation, have no other source of heat, or have no available natural gas service.

The new rule also places limits on fireplaces and wood stoves in new developments and has recently resulted in the region's first "no burn" days for wood stoves and fireplaces. It was the subject of intense debate before its adoption in July on a 6-3 vote of the district's board.

Now, district spokeswoman Janis Parker said, the controversy seems to have abated.

"We haven't heard much opposition to it," Parker said. "The real estate industry wants to comply, wants to do the right thing and inform their clients. And we've made it pretty simple by providing a 'statement of compliance' for them to use."

Copies of the statement are available on the district's Web site, [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org), and have been distributed to Valley real estate agents.

Also, district representatives have put on briefings for Realtor associations and Valley brokerages.

Among them was London Properties in Fresno.

Its owner, Daniel Conner, said his industry generally views the disclosure requirements as a small price to pay for better air.

"It's not a terribly onerous requirement," he said. "We've already got 8,000 pieces of paper on every transaction, and one more isn't going to matter."

Wood stoves and inserts that meet current requirements are listed on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Web site

(<http://www.epa.gov/Compliance/monitoring/programs/woodstoves/index.html>).

They also should have a sticker or metal plate showing the manufacturing date and an "EPA Phase II" certification level.

Still, some agents are worried about the details.

"One of the things that might be an issue is determining whether it's in compliance or not," said Terry Meehan, outgoing president of the Fresno Association of Realtors. "They say there are placards, but on three that I looked at, I couldn't find any."

Conner said that costs of removing or replacing a noncomplying wood stove or insert are running about \$300.

But he said, most home sellers and buyers appear to be taking the new requirements in stride.

"I would say 90% of the people just shrug and say 'whatever,' " he said.

The reporter can be reached at [rclemings@fresnobee.com](mailto:rclemings@fresnobee.com) or 441-6371.

### **Restrictions on burning take effect**

Modesto Bee

By ERIC STERN, BEE CAPITOL BUREAU

Thurs. Jan. 1, 2004

Snuggling next to an open fireplace in your living room on a cold winter night -- that's OK.

But burning wood in an older stove or fireplace insert will get a tougher look from environmental regulators beginning today.

Under a new rule, a home with a wood-burning heater in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District cannot be sold or transferred unless the heater is an open-hearth fireplace, a pellet stove, or a certified fireplace insert or stove.

The air district, which spans eight counties from San Joaquin to Kern, is under federal orders to clean the winter air.

"We're among the worst particulate matter pollution (areas) in the United States," said Anthony Presto, public education representative for the air district's northern region.

Wood smoke gets stuck in stagnant valley air, aggravating asthma and causing breathing problems especially harmful for people with heart conditions.

The new restriction follows the air district's no-burn rules that took effect Nov. 1. On certain days during the winter, wood burning is discouraged or banned.

Wood-burning heating units and traditional fireplaces also are being limited for new homes in higher-density areas.

Homeowners can keep older, wood-burning heating units, but when homes change ownership, the heating units must be changed.

Old-fashioned, decorative wood-burning stoves are fine -- as long as they are rendered inoperable when homes are sold.

"It's a slow phaseout," Presto said. "It's the old, dirty-burning ones that we need to remove."

### **Some stoves, fireplaces not affected**

Natural gas and propane stoves and fireplaces are not affected.

As part of home sales, owners must file compliance statements with the air district. The district has been working with real estate agents to inform them of the new rule.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists almost 600 certified models of wood-burning devices on its Web site.

Failure to comply with the new rule could lead to yet-to-be-determined fines on home sellers.

Even though open-hearth fireplaces are significant polluters, existing ones will not be restricted further because people do not regularly use them to heat homes, Presto said.

However, traditional fireplaces are banned in new developments with more than two homes per acre. Other wood-burning heating units will be limited in new developments.

Chris Joseph, owner of Stanislaus Stove and Flue in Modesto, said he expects people still will be drawn to wood-burning heaters because they offer energy independence and efficiency.

The heat blown from a wood-burning fireplace insert is cozy, smooth and entertaining, he said. "It heats your whole body."

On the Net:

[www.epa.gov/Compliance/resources/publications/monitoring/programs/woodstoves/certifiedwood.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/Compliance/resources/publications/monitoring/programs/woodstoves/certifiedwood.pdf)

### **Getting rid of waste harder with ban on burning**

Modesto Bee

By RON DeLACYBEE STAFF WRITER

Friday, Jan. 2, 2004

SONORA -- Burning residential waste outdoors, along with any kind of burning in barrels, is now against the law in most of California.

"Whenever garbage is burned -- be it junk mail, food containers or gift-wrapping paper -- toxic compounds and particulate matter are dispersed," said Alan Lloyd, chairman of the California Air Resources Board

The new law, which went into effect Thursday, still allows backyard burning of dry vegetation and untreated wood if local ordinances don't ban it. But such burning cannot include paper, cardboard or garbage.

And any burning must be done in open piles. Burn barrels are out -- largely because they are more conducive to burning paper and trash than vegetation.

"It's hard to put a tree branch in a burn barrel," said Gennet Paauwe, a spokeswoman for the Air Resources Board.

Burn barrels and open burning already are illegal in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, an eight-county region stretching from San Joaquin in the north to Kern in the south. Agricultural burning in piles is allowed, but only by permit.

While the new law took effect Thursday, it's hard to slam the door on all barrel burning. So there are exceptions. Any ZIP code with fewer than three people per square mile is exempt, and the law allows for exemptions in unincorporated areas averaging fewer than 10 people per square mile. Thirteen communities or air pollution districts in the state applied for those exemptions and all got them, according to Paauwe.

In Tuolumne County, the only one is the 95321 ZIP code, which includes Groveland and Pine Mountain Lake -- even though Pine Mountain Lake is relatively suburban. The area includes more than 2,500 homes on 3,600 acres and has garbage pickup service.

County Supervisor Mark Thornton, who represents Groveland and Pine Mountain Lake and pushed for the exemption, declined to discuss the issue with The Bee.

For areas without exemptions -- and that's nearly everywhere -- enforcement is up to local air pollution control districts.

Gary Caseri, air pollution control manager for Tuolumne County, said the emphasis will be on education, not penalties -- although fines up to \$500 could come down the road for repeat offenders or people burning garbage.

## **Garbage behind new law**

It was, after all, burning garbage -- plastics, metal, clothing -- that inspired the law. Burning that stuff produces dioxins that can foul the air as well as groundwater, Paauwe said.

She emphasized that burn barrels are legal in exempted areas -- but only to burn vegetation, nontreated wood, cardboard and nonslick paper. A lot of magazines, catalogues and junk mail are suddenly banned from backyard burns no matter how few people live in an area.

And a lot of burn barrels are suddenly garbage themselves. Tuolumne County recycling coordinator Mark Rappaport said transfer stations will take burn barrels for \$2 -- \$9 less than the regular minimum fee -- even if they have garbage in them.

They must not contain ashes, though.

Or you can get coupons with transfer-station or garbage-collection receipts. For details on that offer, call 533-5588.

Or you can turn your burn barrel into a planter.  
You just can't burn it.

## **Editorial**

### **Our Views: Expect local leaders to get back to basics**

Modesto Bee

Thurs. Jan 1, 2004

It's not a wild prediction to say that local officials will focus on fundamentals in 2004.

After all, necessity dictates it.

With a host of growth, environmental, health and safety concerns ever increasing, and critical funding from the state decreasing almost daily, there are plenty of tough decisions to be made.

While the back-to-basics discussions on these issues won't be as titillating as some of last year's scandals or the anticipated testimony in Scott Peterson's trial, they are assuredly significantly more important over the long term.

A sampling of the New Year's most pressing issues:

**Making ends meet** -- With the state budget crisis far from solved, money will be an issue for virtually every agency, including many of the nonprofits that have relied so heavily on government funding.

This really is the time to sort out what's truly essential. For example, as Capitol bureau reporter Eric Stern pointed out in Sunday's Bee, the state seems to be getting out of the business of offering rewards to solve crimes. Those rewards are useful, but are they essential?

In this Sunday's Bee, we'll offer some more radical ideas for dealing with the state budget mess.

**Air and water** -- These are always the big two, but even more so now that the valley has sunk to the bottom, joining Los Angeles in the distinction of being the most polluted place in the country.

**Air pollution** is a regional issue, but needs to be weighed when considering what seem like purely local decisions, such as roundabouts and subdivisions whose primary purpose is to serve more commuters.

How big is water? The price tag on the Gallo Arts Center is dwarfed by the costs for three projects to treat river water for city use. Work has started on the \$135 million treatment plant on the Stanislaus River that will serve four south San Joaquin County cities. The Turlock Irrigation District is looking at constructing a treatment plant on the Tuolumne River near Geer Road. The price options range from almost \$47 million to \$98 million. The city of Modesto and Modesto Irrigation District are looking at doubling the size of their water treatment facility at Modesto Reservoir.

That's some of the new stuff. Modesto also needs to look at the aging pipes in downtown, for instance, which date to the turn of the last century. Then there's the mandate to improve the purity of water released into the rivers. The new City Council will be more than knee-deep in this.

**Police** -- Last year, the Modesto City Council approved 17 new firefighter positions. Police Chief Roy Wasden also will be wanting an increase in police patrols, largely because the city is growing. Stanislaus County also operated short on deputies and detectives.

**Transportation** -- With existing roadways rapidly deteriorating and new and expanded ones desperately needed, we hope this is finally the year that Stanislaus County leaders ask voters to approve a half-cent sales tax increase to fund long-overdue improvements. No one wants higher taxes, but this is the only way we're going to get moving on some of the major highway projects.

**Health care** -- Availability, accessibility and affordability of health care -- for the public at large and public employees -- will be a hot issue. State budget cutbacks are certain to reduce or even eliminate many health and welfare programs. And at least some public employee groups are more interested in who pays for their increasing health insurance than they are about pay raises.

## Editorial

### Here is our blueprint for the new year

Visalia Times-Delta

January 1, 2004

#### *Clean slate.*

The wonderful thing about the new year is the chance to start over. Out with the old, in with the new.

Usually, it's called strategic planning. But because it is Jan.1, we get to call them New Year's resolutions.

What are New Year's resolutions but a blueprint for the future?

The suggestions in our blueprint are achievable. As a community, let's try to make 2004 the year in which we make some progress.

#### *Planning and Growth*

Job One for Visalia in 2004 ought to be resolution of the west Highway 198 corridor. Ambivalence over this area has paralyzed the community for years, frustrating property owners, business people and community leaders alike.

The Visalia City Council in October committed to buying land and setting it aside from development. We applauded that move. Now make it happen.. Explain the plans. Show us the money. It's time.

#### *Recreation*

It has been years since the city anointed a piece of ground in north Visalia as the site of a regional sports park. Nothing has happened in those years to actually build it. Yes, an advisory commission recommended uses and designs, but it is no closer to rolling out the first soccer ball.

The community should resolve that 2004 be the year when we see a ball.

Yes, money will be an obstacle. Money will always be an obstacle.

#### *Fun park*

See the item above.

Now that the city and the park's developer are on speaking terms again, the City Council should make this a priority. Council members have come and gone while pledging to get this park built for the youth of Visalia. Make this the year that pledge is fulfilled.

#### *County planning*

Tulare County is working on revisions to its general plan that would set the planning guidelines for the next 30 years.

This presents another opportunity for the cities of Tulare and Visalia to collaborate on growth limits that will keep the two from melding together.

The two cities and the county have never been able to agree on a buffer of open space. One obstacle is that they have only considered a limited number of options that usually mean dictating to property owners.

There are many ways for Tulare and Visalia to keep their distinct distance. The revision of the county's general plan is an opportunity to explore them.

### *Air quality*

Let's resolve to leave the air a little cleaner on Dec. 31 than it is today.

Admittedly, the region took some steps toward cleaner air last year. But it also backslid. We can't make it all up in one year, but we can make progress.

How? Simply by paying attention to how we use vehicles and appliances. We could make huge improvements with changes in routine, such as using some other transportation than a personal vehicle once a month.

And let's put pressure on our public officials.

### *Protect a child*

The Valley's record on child abuse and neglect, teen parenthood, child hunger and early childhood development and health care are worst in the state. Let's resolve in 2004 to reverse that trend.

Programs can help: Healthy Start, First Five Tulare County, Pro-Youth HEART, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Teen Age Parenting Program (TAPP), California Conservation Corps, just to name a few. Community support for these organizations -- as sponsors, volunteers, donors and advocates -- can make a difference.

Even more, we can make a difference in young lives by giving of ourselves.

### *Health care*

Let's make 2004 the year we give this issue the attention it deserves. The damaged state of health care is a national crisis and one of the most costly and threatening issues of our time. Yet the public ignores it. We must start paying attention.

We're under no delusions that 2004 will bring ultimate solutions. But let's make 2004 a year we will be able to look back and say, "We made a difference. We left a smaller problem than the one we found."

You have to start somewhere, with a blueprint.

Happy New Year.

## **Editorial**

### **A season of purpose**

Fresno Bee

Thursday, January 1, 2004

For several years now, our annual "look ahead" for Fresno and the Valley has been a somber exercise -- our challenges are daunting, our problems frequently seem intractable and our will to make things better is often missing in action.

So let's try something different. For 2004, how about a look ahead that dwells on how much we might achieve? Here are a few headlines we'd like to see this coming year:

"Governor, Legislature in historic agreement on state's finances"

"Local governments gain revenue security"

"Measure C renewal passes: boosts funding for mass transit, alternative fuels"

"Voters approve high-speed rail bond"



"New regional transit service rolls out clean-fuel buses"  
"Air quality effort shows big gains"  
"Condo project downtown quickly sells out first phase"  
"Planners, developers agree: Fresno's new general plan is working"  
"Job scene brightens with opening of business parks"  
"Job training efforts consolidated, streamlined"  
"Regional economic development effort starts with a bang"  
"Fresno Unified board decides more funds will flow to classrooms"  
"River parkway adds crucial acreage in Madera County"  
"New regional parks planned for southeast Fresno, Clovis"  
"Fresno County voters overwhelmingly approve library tax extension"

The impact of the state's budget-and-debt crisis, and the long-term dysfunctionality of government finances is a menacing cloud hovering over California and the Valley. Everything that we need to do, in the state and in this region, is hostage to the inability of elected leaders in Sacramento to come up with a set of useful solutions. The signs are not good; the governor and the Legislature are still gripped in denial, even though most Californians have resigned themselves to the need for painful spending cuts and tax increases to get out of this hole.

But let's assume, for the sake of this upbeat set of scenarios for 2004, that our leaders can somehow summon the wisdom and the courage to make real fixes.

Recognition of the need for economic development in Fresno and the Valley is already widespread. Our ag-based economy is inherently one of low wages and high unemployment. Diversification is essential. But it isn't simple, and won't happen without major improvements in other areas, such as air quality, transportation and land-use planning.

Great gains were made last year in raising awareness of the seriousness of our air quality problem here, and many small but useful steps were taken. But we haven't really begun to address the single greatest culprit fouling our air: the cars and trucks we love so well. And the portents are not promising. Surveys point out a wide gulf between our understanding that the air is bad and our willingness to accept our own responsibility for it -- it's not me and my car doing all the damage.

We also have a long way to go with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, whose governing board -- elected officials from eight Valley counties -- sometimes seems to care less about cleaning up the air than protecting entrenched economic interests and the status quo.

We could get good news on several transportation fronts this year. The best would be the passage of two ballot measures: The statewide high-speed rail bond and the renewal of Fresno County's Measure C, the 1986 sales-tax initiative that's paid for so much road and freeway construction in recent years.

The Measure C extension has the potential to aid significant improvements in air quality, among other things -- but only if it is the right measure. The wrong measure was offered to voters in 2003, and they rejected it. They are likely to do the same to any subsequent initiative that doesn't offer new visions in mass transit and alternative fuels, and spend less heavily on the old vision of endless highways forever clogged like the arteries of a dying man.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of the high-speed rail project. It has gone from "Buck Rogers" stuff, in the early and dismissive assessment of the unmissed former Gov. Gray Davis, to a keenly desirable project on several levels. Such trains would spur enormous economic

development in the Valley, beginning with, but not limited to, a generation's worth of well-paying jobs for every construction worker available. The rail line would also create a desperately needed psychological connection between moribund inland California and the bright and vibrant coastal part of the state.

There is the further benefit of reducing the number of cars on the Valley's highways, which will advance the effort to clean the air.

New visions of land-use planning are taking hold, and we hope we see that process accelerate. There is still a crying need for regional planning in the Valley, and there is still an enormous inertia of parochialism and pettiness blocking it from happening. It's not likely that elected leaders will change their ways significantly until there is a much stronger constituency for more regionalism.

There are bright spots: Fresno's new general plan halted -- for the first time -- the historic northward plunge of the city and redirects it to the southeast and back into the central core of the city. Denser housing clustered around employment and commercial centers will pay a number of dividends. Two of the most important are less traffic -- which means less air pollution -- and getting us closer to the critical mass needed to justify and support mass transit systems such as light rail, shuttles, trolleys, a monorail or some combination of all of those.

Fresno's downtown is cooking, but there is one crucial element still missing: housing. Someone's got to take the plunge and build new housing in the immediate vicinity of the Fulton Mall. Without it, all the new buildings and new jobs pouring into downtown won't help. Downtown's got to bustle at night and on the weekends, and not just 9-to-5 Monday through Friday.

It won't take much. Fresno's population is right around 500,000 now. Fewer than 10% of that number living downtown would be enough to send it soaring, with the demand for services bringing in all manner of shops, stores and entertainment venues. We still hear the timid voices of those who insist Fresnans won't live downtown, and we still ask: How do we know that when we've never given people the opportunity to do so?

Jobs and economic development will follow if we can make progress -- and stay the course -- in these areas. But there is a catch: Fresno's work force may not be ready for new jobs even if they begin to arrive in large numbers.

It is sometimes suggested that Fresno's vast army of underemployed and unemployed people is actually a plus. Their eagerness for good-paying jobs is so profound, the theory goes, that they represent an attraction to employers seeking to expand or relocate.

The truth is somewhat grimmer. Many of Fresno's unemployed have none of the skills that employers seek, including the most rudimentary abilities to read, write and do simple arithmetic. Too many cannot speak English. Too many come from families that have been trapped in the cycle of joblessness and hopelessness for several generations.

Part of that is the fault of local schools. The Fresno Unified School District is everyone's favorite educational target, but in fact the problems are more widespread. Fresno Unified itself now appears to be mired in an endless swamp of bitterness and suspicion, with administrators and teachers at each other's throats and students lost in the middle. There are lots of ways Fresno Unified can make improvements, but the most important may be finding a way to let the angry steam out of the system and build at least a semblance of trust.

There's more. The San Joaquin River Parkway keeps growing, but continues to need support. We need more and better parks, and playing fields for young and old alike. Libraries in Fresno County will be asking for an extension of the sales tax we approved in 1998. Museums need to grow and prosper.

That's a lot to look for in 2004's headlines, and a lot to ask of a region that has so many problems and so few resources. But it's a new year, and as they say, there's no time like the present.

#### [Letter to the Editor](#)

#### **This path would be renewable**

The Record (Stockton)

Friday, Jan. 1, 2004

Leaders in commerce, government and higher education have a chance to take a fresh look at sources of renewable energy in the Central Valley. They must seize it.

The Valley's economic engine will remain agriculture for years to come. A review of natural byproducts reveals that new economic doors can be opened.

With reliable water availability always a question and lower-priced farm commodities filling the global marketplace, it's time for a new dialogue on the Valley's economic future.

The 19-county region is poised to stake out a national leadership role in renewable energy, according to a study by the Modesto-based Great Valley Center.

The Valley has natural resources in abundance: dairy manure, rice straw, wind power, almond shells, geothermal hot spots, corn and conservation efficiencies unattainable elsewhere. Even hydroelectric power is possible as farmers look for new ways to wheel and deal with their water rights.

The Central Valley, with San Joaquin County as a potential leader, can become a leader in developing profitable, renewable forms of energy. The county already is a leader in usable biomass, with an estimated energy potential of up to 12.2 million British thermal units.

The county is ideally situated to become a center for renewable energy. Among San Joaquin Delta College, University of the Pacific and CSU Stanislaus-Stockton Center, it also has institutions to facilitate such utilization.

The move to cleaner alternatives also holds the promise of new jobs and new revenue streams for agribusiness.

Resources in ag waste, sun and wind power are largely untapped.

There are additional incentives: environmental concerns over water and air quality, and the rising costs associated with traditional farming.

What's needed is a process that streamlines such a transition. With so many decisions keyed to the moment, it will take foresight and out-of-the-box thinking to lead the way.

Valley residents require long-term planning and preparation. We need a coalition of political and private-enterprise leaders who will tackle:

- \* Barriers to higher costs that accompany renewable energy.
- \* Locating sources of funding.
- \* Government permit and zoning issues.
- \* Problems linked to power connections and distribution.
- \* Lack of expertise.

Great Valley's report -- "Renewable Energy: Strategic Opportunities for California's Great Central Valley" - calls for stronger economic incentives and state policies that favor renewable-energy development.

There's a double payoff: using natural resources that go to waste to improve economic vitality while addressing auxiliary environmental concerns.

Failure to advance down this path would be the greatest waste of all.

**To find out more**

To read the full report, go to [www.greatvalley.org/nvc](http://www.greatvalley.org/nvc) or call (209) 522-5103.