

News Release

For immediate release

March 3, 2009

>>City, business and assignment
editors<<



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Sixth wood-burning season ends *More curtailments keep Valley skies cleaner*

A more health-protective wood-burning rule resulted in cleaner Valley skies this winter.

The sixth Check Before You Burn season ended Feb. 28. This season, the rule was tightened in order to be even more protective of public health. And preliminary air-quality measurements illustrate that the result was cleaner air throughout the Valley: Compared to the 2007-08 season, there was a 50 percent reduction in days deemed “unhealthy” throughout the air basin, with no “unhealthy” days in Fresno County; and the average concentration of pollutants (a method of measurement) declined by 10 percent.

A full report on the health-protective effects of this season’s wood-burning rule will be presented at the air district’s Governing Board meeting in April.

“By calling for wood-burning curtailments at lower levels, we were able to prevent some of the worst air pollution this winter,” said Seyed Sadredin, the District’s air pollution control officer. Businesses in the Valley, including agriculture, are subject to some of the toughest air regulations in the nation. “Of our major air pollution concerns in the Valley, particulate matter is the most harmful and has devastating health effects.”

Particulate matter (PM) has been linked to increased incidence of chronic lung disease, acute respiratory impairment, heart attacks and premature death. Residential wood burning, whether in an open-hearth fireplace or wood-burning device, can put as much as 17 tons per day of harmful PM into the eight-county air basin. Residential wood-burning devices are the largest source of particulate pollution during winter months. Surveys have shown that 70 percent of fireplace use is for ambiance rather than for heating purposes.

“We have made significant progress in cleaning the Valley’s air, but we cannot achieve our clean air goals on the back of businesses alone. We can get to cleaner air faster and cheaper by Valley residents doing their part to help,” Sadredin said.

The Valley’s wood-burning rule addresses these emissions by prohibiting the use of wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates. The wood-burning season runs from November through February. Violators are subject to fines.

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There are exemptions to the rule's wood-burning curtailments, however: where wood burning is the sole source of heat or if the residence does not have natural-gas heating (even if propane is used). And the use of gas fireplaces and devices is permitted at all times.

While District officials recognize that the more stringent regulation was an adjustment for some Valley residents, they point to cleaner skies this winter as evidence that reducing wood burning means healthier air for all Valley residents. Preliminary data indicates that with a few exceptions, residents throughout the Valley complied with the added restrictions.

Another factor in cleaner air has been a marked reduction in agricultural burning. Most agricultural burning was prohibited by District regulations adopted in 2004 and 2007, and since that time, there has been a 70 percent decrease in agricultural burning in the Valley. Additional regulations that are being developed are expected to further reduce remaining agricultural burning emissions by 2010.

Wood-burning curtailments and notices of violations (NOVs) by county for 2008-2009:

County	Curtailments	NOVs
San Joaquin	24	24
Stanislaus	34	56
Merced	32	15
Madera	34	43
Fresno	46	113
Kings	37	7
Tulare	35	21
Kern (Valley air basin portion)	54	72

The Valley Air District covers eight counties including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and San Joaquin Valley air basin portions of Kern. For assistance, contact the nearest District office in Modesto at (209) 557-6440, Fresno (559) 230-6000 or Bakersfield (661) 392-5500.