

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

News Release

Embargoed until:
12:01 a.m. Monday, April 14, 2003

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Residential wood-burning rule up for public review again

A proposed rule that would introduce a mandatory no-light program for residential wood-burning devices in the San Joaquin Valley will be up for public review again next month.

Proposed amendments to the Valley Air District's Rule 4901, Residential Wood Burning, will be presented to the public and stakeholders during workshops scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Monday, May 5; 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 6; and 2 p.m. Wednesday, May 7. All meetings will be video-conferenced among the Air District's three regional offices so that residents may attend and provide comments during any of the three meetings in any of the three offices. The offices are located in Fresno at 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave.; in Modesto at 4230 Kiernan Ave., Suite 130; and in Bakersfield at 2700 M St., Suite 275.

The Air District's current residential wood-burning rule was adopted in 1993 to protect Valley residents from airborne particulate matter. Particulate matter, which is primarily a wintertime problem, is composed of nitrates, microscopic pieces of fly ash, tiny droplets of liquid, dust, smoke and soot. The San Joaquin Valley air basin doesn't meet federal or state standards for particulate matter air pollution. High particulate concentrations can reduce lung function, exacerbate bronchitis, and trigger asthma and heart attacks.

Residential wood burning is a significant source of particulates in the Valley. In fact, on the worst winter nights, wood smoke can be responsible for up to one-third of the particulate air pollution in urban areas.

The existing wood-burning rule includes a voluntary no-light program and prohibits the retail sale of anything but the cleanest wood-burning units on the market. In February 2002, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency determined that the rule doesn't fully comply with federal Clean Air Act requirements and must be made more stringent. Air District staff prepared rule amendments that were presented during public workshops last December. Comments received during that public review process have led to a new draft rule, which includes:

Mandatory curtailment. On about 25 nights during the winter, when airborne particulates are forecast to reach unhealthy concentrations, burning wood in any home-heating device would be prohibited. The draft rule includes an exemption for homes that do not have natural gas service, in which wood burning is the sole source of heat, and for homes that are above 3000 feet in elevation. Mandatory curtailment programs have been implemented in cities throughout the country including Mammoth Lakes, Calif.; Reno, Nev.; and Spokane, Wash. The version of the draft rule presented during last December's workshops also included exemptions on certain nights for EPA-certified "Phase II" wood-burning devices. However, District staff and some members of the public noted that enforcing a two-tier system would be difficult, thereby decreasing the effectiveness of the rule. Thus, the new draft rule proposes a single level of curtailment for all wood-burning devices.

Density Limits. In new residential developments with more than two dwellings per acre, no wood-burning devices would be allowed. In new developments with one or two dwellings per acre, only one wood-burning device would be allowed in each dwelling.

Retrofit at time of sale or transfer of property. This component of the rule would require that any non-certified wood-burning stove or insert be upgraded to EPA-certified Phase II wood-burning devices or to natural gas or propane devices prior to the sale or transfer of property. Alternatively, the non-certified devices could be removed or rendered inoperable permanently.

Anyone unable to attend the meetings may also submit comments by mail to Tom Jordan, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave, Fresno, CA 93726 or by e-mail to tom.jordan@valleyair.org. Additional information regarding the upcoming meetings and the proposed rule will be available on the District's website at www.valleyair.org starting Tuesday morning or by calling (559) 230-5800.