

News Release

10-25-2005

For Immediate Release



San Joaquin Valley
Air Pollution
Control District

North District Media Contact - Modesto
Anthony Presto
(209) 557-6400

Central District Media Contact - Fresno
Kelly Hogan Malay
(559) 230-6000

South District Media Contact - Bakersfield
Brenda Turner
(661) 326-6900

TO:
Local News Sections

Wood-burning restrictions begin Nov. 1

‘Check Before You Burn’ ramps up as air basin nears air standard

(Fresno, CA) – San Joaquin Valley residents are reminded to check their county’s air-quality status before lighting a wood-burning fireplace, insert or pellet stove this fall and winter.

Check Before You Burn, which begins its third season Nov. 1 and runs through the end of February, is designed to reduce concentrations of harmful air pollutants Valley-wide. The program prohibits the use of wood-burning heating devices when and where air quality is expected to be unhealthy (an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher).

A second component of Check Before You Burn encourages residents to voluntarily refrain from using wood-burning devices, or to burn as cleanly as possible, when air quality is expected to be unhealthy for sensitive groups (an AQI between 101 and 150).

Residents should check the wood-burning status in their county before they light a fire. The status will be available starting at 4 p.m. on Monday, Oct. 31. English and Spanish telephone updates are available toll-free at 1-800 SMOG INFO (1-800-766-4463). Hmong updates are available toll-free at 1-877-344-1212. The status also is available online at www.valleyair.org and through many local news outlets. When a mandatory curtailment is issued, it is in effect countywide for 24 hours, from midnight to midnight.

Uncontrolled residential wood burning throughout the Valley could create about 24 tons per day of particulate matter known as PM10. That is roughly four times the amount spewed in one day by all the motor vehicles traveling on Valley roads and highways. Exposure to high concentrations of PM10 can trigger heart attacks, increase risk for lung cancer, aggravate conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, and reduce lung function.

The mandatory curtailments don’t apply to homes in which wood burning is the sole source of heat; homes in areas where natural-gas service isn’t available; and homes above 3,000 feet in elevation. The curtailments apply to wood-burning devices in all other homes, business, lodges and restaurants.

“Without a doubt, all of us are bracing for the anticipated jump in natural-gas prices this winter,” said Dave Crow, air pollution control officer for the Valley Air District. “But it’s as important as ever to stop and think before lighting a fire. If air quality is poor, please help improve the situation by not starting a fire. And when you do burn, please burn as cleanly as possible.”

One federal standard within reach

Due in large part to public cooperation with Check Before You Burn and other programs that reduce emissions, the Valley's air quality has improved significantly over recent years. In fact, if PM10 concentrations remain low through the rest of 2005, the Valley air basin will meet the federal PM10 standard for the first time since passage of the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments.

Although meeting the federal PM10 standard would be a major milestone, the air basin still has much work ahead to meet the more stringent state PM10 standard, as well as state and federal standards for PM2.5 and ozone, the primary ingredient in smog.

In its first two seasons, Check Before You Burn resulted in mandatory curtailments on two days in Tulare County, three days in the valley portion of Kern County, and four days in Fresno County. A total of 44 notices have been issued for violations of the curtailments. The Air District also has made numerous requests for voluntary action, with Fresno County logging the most -- 97 days of voluntary curtailments -- and Kings County the least at seven days.

When mandatory wood-burning curtailments are in place, Air District inspectors perform surveillance and investigate complaints. Violations of the wood-burning prohibitions can result in fines ranging from \$50 to \$1,000, depending on the severity of the violation and any extenuating circumstances. To report violations, residents may call the Air District during work hours and after-hours at:

- 1-800-281-7003 in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties.
- 1-800-870-1037 in Madera, Fresno and Kings counties.
- 1-800-926-5550 in Tulare and the valley portion of Kern counties.

The Valley Air District covers eight counties including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern. For assistance, contact the nearest District office in Modesto at 209-557-6440, Fresno at 559-230-6000 or Bakersfield at 661-326-6900.

###