

District says no-burn days improved air quality

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer
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The annual "Check Before You Burn" wood-burning season ended Sunday in Kern County with fewer no-burn days than last year and continued improvement in the valley's winter air quality, according to data released Tuesday by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

During the 2009-2010 wood-burning season, which runs from Nov. 1 through the end of February, valley areas of Kern County saw 41 days when fireplace use was prohibited -- compared to 54 days last season.

Air district officials praised valley residents for their cooperation and willingness to take part in the effort, though nearly 500 citations -- 64 in Kern -- were handed out to valley residents who burned on restricted days.

The annual winter program restricts residential wood-burning in an effort to prevent the build-up of dangerous fine-particulate matter known as PM 2.5, which has been linked to chronic lung disease, respiratory illness, heart attacks and premature death.

From November through February, forecasts are issued daily by the district to determine whether open-hearth fireplaces, wood stoves or inserts, or pellet stoves may be used in the eight counties that comprise the district. This was the seventh season since the rule was adopted by the air district in 2003.

District officials believe the program is more effective at reducing wintertime pollution than all other regulations imposed on valley businesses.

"This is a great example of how we can achieve major reductions in air pollution without having to resort to cost-prohibitive regulations on businesses," Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director, said in a release.

Sadredin credits the restricted burning measure for bringing about "major improvements in Valley's air quality."

This season, there was a 57 percent decrease in the number of unhealthy days valleywide compared with the 2008-2009 season. In addition, the number of days that exceeded the federal health standard for fine-particulate pollution declined by 41 percent over last year.

To top it off, this season's progress came on the heels of the 2008-2009 season when the valley experienced one of the cleanest winters on record, according to the air district.

Although Sadredin didn't mention this season's higher than normal rainfall as a factor in the valley's improved winter air quality, it's sure to be a positive factor.

District spokeswoman Jaime Holt said the district is conducting a comprehensive assessment of the seasonal data. A detailed report analyzing the effectiveness of the no-burn rule and other factors -- including weather -- that may have contributed to the air quality improvements will be presented at a public hearing April 15 in Fresno, she said.

Residential wood-burning is prohibited when fine-particulate pollution is forecasted to be above 30 micrograms per cubic meter, Holt said. Following a rule change last year, agricultural burning has been restricted at a similar threshold

Transportation center clears EIR hurdle

District, City plunge ahead on regional transportation facility

By Cheryl Lingo
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This week, the school district and the City took another step toward a multi-million dollar joint facility that would bring a state-of-the-art transportation center to the eastern outskirts of Reedley. The proposed facility would combine the Kings Canyon Unified School District's (KCUSD)

transportation operation and the City of Reedley's public works department into a single facility that could also serve regional needs.

An environmental impact report (EIR) was approved this week by the school board, the lead agency on the project. No comments on the final EIR were received during the Jan. 23 public hearing, which took place at a regular meeting of the KCUSD governing board. Of the agencies who received the draft EIR (California Air Resources Board, City of Dinuba, City of Orange Cove, City of Parlier, City of Reedley, County of Fresno, Department of Toxic Substance Control, Fresno Department of Education, Pacific Gas & Electric Company, [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#), Southern California Gas Company, Alta Irrigation District, Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning, State Department of Water Resources, State Clearinghouse, Reedley Branch Library), only the Air Pollution Control District returned comments which were incorporated into the final EIR.

The district and the City also formed a joint powers authority to help secure grants from state and federal sources including ARRA, California Energy Commission and the U.S. Department of Energy. An \$8 million grant request was denied last year, but the JPA will be in place in time to pursue another round of funding this spring. School and City officials have been advised by state and federal legislators that jointly used projects are more likely to be funded.

If funding is secured, construction could begin in fall of 2010, with commencement of operations by 2012. Planned to be built in phases, the CVTC project would take will take up to five years to complete.

This project is subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) which requires—among other things—that alternatives be considered for the project, including 'no project' and 'alternate sites'. The alternate site chosen for the EIR is Alta Elementary School on E. Parlier Avenue. The EIR found that the limited size of the parcel would impose on the operations of the transit center.

A 27-acre site at Olson and Huntsman Avenues—part of a nearly 37-acre parcel owned by KCUSD— is proposed for the CVTC that would accommodate an initial fleet of 60 buses and more than 200 service vehicles, with room to expand. It would allow Reedley High School to expand its athletic fields into the space vacated by the current KCUSD transportation operation, and bring five City departments—currently housed in three locations—under one roof.

The CVTC project would incorporate compressed natural gas fueling facilities, a vehicle wash facility, service bays, a regeneration center and solar covered parking. In addition, there would be 24-hour access to ethanol, biodiesel, ultra-low sulfur diesel and unleaded regular gasoline fuels that would also be available to other agencies. Fuel would be stored in five 10,000 gallon underground storage tanks.

But, if the JPA is successful in attracting funding, the Central Valley Transportation Center (CVTC) would be far more than a center for maintaining City and school district vehicles. The blueprint includes a 10,900 education center that would offer vocational training related to green technologies, specifically those in use at the transportation center.