

Check Before You Burn ends 8th Season

Visalia Times Delta, Wed., March 2, 2011

The eighth season of an annual wintertime air-quality program that limits dangerous airborne particulate matter concluded Monday.

Check Before You Burn runs from November through February each winter and restricts the use of residential wood-burning devices when air quality deteriorates, in order to prevent the buildup of fine-particulate matter.

During the season, wood-burning forecasts are issued each day, by county, which determines if open-hearth fireplaces, wood-burning stoves or inserts, or pellet stoves can be used. Tickets are issued for violations.

During the 2010-11 season, there was a 44 percent decrease in the number of unhealthy days (based on the Air Quality Index) over 2009-10. The number of days that exceeded the federal health standard for fine-particulate pollution also declined by 9 percent over last season.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Wed., March 2, 2011:](#)

Pesticide air monitoring launched in Shafter, Salinas, Ripon

By Mark Grossi

The state has established an air-monitoring network to learn more about health risks from long-time exposure to pesticides in Shafter, Salinas and Ripon.

The Department of Pesticide Regulation set up the network as a follow-up to pilot monitoring projects in Parlier in 2006 and Lompoc in 2000.

The agency will monitor for 34 pesticides, including six fumigants and 11 organophosphates. DPR selected these pesticides based on the amount of use and potential health risks.

Shafter, Salinas and Ripon were selected from a list of 226 communities, based on pesticide use on surrounding farmland and demographics, including percentage of children, the elderly and farm workers

Data collected by the network will be released annually beginning in 2012.

[Fresno Bee columnist, Wed., March 2, 2011:](#)

Fresno's 'toxicity' isn't whole truth

By Bill McEwen

For more decades than I want to count, I've been drinking Fresno tap water and breathing Fresno air.

If you believe the statistics-compilers and hair-splitters at Forbes, I should be dead.

Or at least nearing my last breath.

According to Forbes, ours is the third-most-toxic city in America.

To this I say, I hope the job creators at City Hall recruit a couple of smokestack industries and take us to No. 1.

I mean, if you're going to be toxic, why not go all the way?

Forbes says that we have too many nitrates in our water, too many unhealthy air days and 338,000 pounds of "on-site" toxic releases reported in 2009 within the city limits.

Now I'm for clean air and water. I'm no fan of toxic dumps. But what's missing from this list -- and similar best/worst compilations -- is context.

Allow me to provide some: If you don't smoke, do drugs and/or frequent a beauty shop that gets the mud for its facials from a Superfund site, chances are you'll live to a ripe old age in Fresno.

Life involves trade-offs. And I've chosen to trade the odds of our air, water and toxins shaving a few months or years off my life for the advantages of Fresno living.

I like our metropolitan area, which has both a million people and a small-town sense of community. I like being in a college town with its sports teams. I like that you can go from the hustle and bustle of the city to the solitude of the countryside in a matter of a few miles.

I love being at the base of the mighty Sierra and its world-class recreation and views. How many years has catching trout, hiking trails and biking among the tall trees added to my life expectancy? At least a couple.

My work commute is less than 20 minutes -- round trip. By my calculations, the time I've saved in traffic is more valuable than living a week or two longer by drinking pure spring water.

These lists are baloney. They exist because the folks in the Scare-'Em-to-Death-Industrial Complex compile the stats, the media have space to fill and ads to sell -- and people like reading them.

But once the lists are consumed, their impact is, well, crickets.

Inquiring minds might wonder about the identities of other toxic cities. The rest of the Top 10 includes Philadelphia, Bakersfield, New York, Baton Rouge, Los Angeles, Houston, St. Louis, Salt Lake City and Riverside.

Pretty good company.

Bad air hasn't stopped Merle Haggard, Buck Owens and Dwight Yoakam from making great music in Bakersfield. Bad water and 4.1 million pounds of on-site toxic releases in 2009 didn't trigger an exodus from New York. Salt Lake City has one of the country's healthiest economies because of its copper mines, refineries and chemical companies, thank you. They keep making movies in Los Angeles despite the infamously dirty air -- although I wouldn't be surprised if Charlie Sheen blames his meltdown on having to breathe the gunk.

Actually, I feel pretty good about Fresno making this Forbes list.

They spelled the name right.

And the picture for the story depicts our city with clear blue skies above the "THE BEST LITTLE CITY IN THE U.S.A." sign.

Maybe the Chamber of Commerce ought to write Forbes a thank-you note.