

Valley wood-burning violations nearly double

By Eric Woomer, staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Tuesday, March 6, 2012

As an unusually dry, stagnant winter comes to an end, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported more no-burn days than ever and more wood-burning violations, compared to 2011.

The increase in no-burn days comes after two straight years of reductions in no-burn days for the eight counties in the district's region. For Tulare County, that meant 54 no-burn days.

"Considering the abnormal conditions this winter that dealt not only us but air districts statewide one blow after another in terms of air quality, this rule was especially critical in minimizing, to the extent possible, this dangerous form of pollution," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's air pollution control officer and executive director.

Wood burning during the winter months is the leading source of harmful pollutants. Having no-burn days between Nov. 1 to Feb. 29 was the equivalent of 140,000 fewer trucks driving through the district during the same timeframe, district officials said.

For the 2011-12 season, Tulare County had 16 more days of no-burning than last year. There were also 25 more citations issued this season, compared to last. Citations can range from \$50 to more than \$250 for those caught burning wood on a no-burn day.

The biggest increases in violations were in Fresno County, where 239 citations were issued, compared to 74 last year. Fresno County also had the highest number of no-burn days at 68. Kern County followed with 56.

Each day during the season, each county determines if open-hearth fireplaces, wood-burning stoves or inserts, or pellet stoves can be used. Curtailments also apply to outdoor chimneys and fire pits. Some residents who rely on wood-burning as their primary source of heat can apply for an exemption.