

## **New fireplace rules not coming until 2016 or later**

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2012

A valley air district proposal that could increase restrictions on residential wood burning in the San Joaquin Valley will not become official until at least 2016 or 2017, air district officials said Monday.

An article in Monday's Californian, based on an Associated Press report, was unclear on when the new restrictions might take place.

The still-fluid proposal by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District -- which governs emissions in the valley portions of Kern County -- could sharply increase the number of no-burn days for fireplaces and other wood-burning heaters and outdoor devices.

The new rules would double the no-burn days in many counties, with Kern's increasing from an average of 47 per season to 78, or nearly two-thirds of the 120 days the "Check Before You Burn" program is in effect from Nov. 1 through the end of February.

The restrictions do not apply to homes where wood burning is the only source of heat.

Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the air district, said Monday that her office received a flood of phone calls from residents up and down the valley who were concerned the rules would be "shoved down their throat" at a meeting of the district board Dec. 20.

But Holt was adamant that won't happen -- that it can't happen without proper public review.

"There is zero chance the wood burning rules will change Dec. 20," Holt said.

On the contrary, the official public workshops and comment period for any proposed rule changes will not begin before 2016, Holt said, and any new wood-burning rules would likely not be implemented until 2017. Even then, the final version may not look exactly like the proposal published last week in the district's "strategy evaluation" of its PM-2.5 particulate control plan.

The 216-page report addresses all kinds of stationary sources of PM-2.5, which is microscopic dust and soot particles smaller than 2.5 microns that harm sensitive lungs, aggravate asthma and are known to cause lung cancer.

The fireplace restrictions are just one part of a developing plan to bring the valley in line with federal clean air standards. The report also addresses incinerators, steam generators, stationary gas turbines and engines, cotton gins, commercial charbroiling and other pollution sources.

The valley "faces significant challenges in meeting the National Ambient Air Quality Standards," the air district states in the report.

Indeed, it's not uncommon for the district to exceed federal standards.

"Tough and innovative rules, such as those for ... residential fireplaces, glass manufacturing, and agricultural burning have set benchmarks for California and the nation," the report continues.

The air district, which covers an eight-county area from Kern in the south to San Joaquin County in the north, argues in the report that restricting wood burning "is the most cost-effective rule for reducing PM-2.5."

But the rule has met with resistance from some residents who use wood burning as a cheap supplement to their overall home heating -- or simply for the beauty, ambiance and tradition of a fire in the home hearth.

Although details may change before 2016, the recommendation as it now stands would lower the curtailment threshold from the current 30 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic meter of air to 20 micrograms per cubic meter. While significantly below the federal standard of 35 micrograms per cubic meter, establishing the curtailment threshold at this proposed level, the report argues, "will reduce the buildup of emissions during the long stagnation periods characteristic to the valley."

The district says it will consider allowing the use of cleaner Environmental Protection Agency-certified wood burning devices during these buildup periods.

Also in the report, there is discussion about expanding the restriction period to include October, March or both.

And if the EPA finds that the valley has failed to attain standards by 2019, a contingency plan could be enacted that would reduce the particulate threshold even lower to 15 micrograms per cubic meter. If that happened, fireplace restrictions in Kern County would nearly be a total prohibition, allowing use during just 20 days of the 120-day burning season.

## **Traffic Pollution in Baby's First Year May Be Linked to Autism**

By Elizabeth Lopatto, Bloomberg News

In the S.F. Chronicle, Monday, Nov. 26, 2012

Exposure to air pollution from cars and trucks during pregnancy and a baby's first year may be associated with an increased risk of autism, a study found.

The study, published today in the Archives of General Psychiatry, compared 279 autistic children with 245 children who didn't have the social and communications disorder. Researchers said the children who lived in homes with the highest estimated levels of air pollution from traffic were three times more likely to be autistic than those with the lowest predicted exposure.

The cause of autism is unknown, though genetic factors are probably important, according to the National Institutes of Health. Among other environmental causes that have been suspected are diet, digestive tract changes, mercury poisoning and vaccine sensitivity.

"The public health implications of these findings are large because air pollution exposure is common and may have lasting neurological effects," the authors, led by Heather Volk, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, wrote in their study.

The increased risk from air pollution generated by car and truck traffic may be due to exhaust particles, though today's study didn't measure the particulate matter at any of the homes of the children analyzed. Instead, researchers modeled what they expected the air pollution was, based on the mother's address. Additionally, the research didn't explore sources of indoor pollution, such as second-hand smoke.

### **Health Hazards**

Pollution from small particles is known to cause heart attacks, early death, decreased lung function and asthma, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The particles, which come from coal plants, car exhaust, fireplaces, furnaces and other sources, are common in urban areas.

Decreasing pollution by about 7 micrograms per cubic meter may lead to a five-month increase in life expectancy, previous research suggested. More study is needed to know how air pollution interacts with autism, the study authors said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in March that 1 in 88 children in the U.S. had autism or a related disorder in 2008, the latest period for which data is available. That was a 23 percent rise from 2006, the agency's researchers reported, saying it was unclear how much of the increase was due to greater awareness of the disease.

## **'Check Before You Burn' 10th season**

Sierra Star, Wednesday, Nov. 21, 2012

The 10th season of an important wintertime pollution-reduction program began Nov. 1.

Because of Valley residents' ongoing efforts and understanding of the importance of changing long-ingrained habits in ways that reduce emissions, Check Before You Burn has resulted in historically clean wintertime air quality in the Valley over the past several years. The wood-burning curtailment program is critical in minimizing levels of harmful particulate matter (PM) in the eight-county air basin.

"Thanks to the public's support and cooperation, this rule is the single most-effective, lowest-cost regulation on record in the Valley," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer. "It is absolutely imperative to improve air quality."

Each day, the district issues a wood-burning forecast by county for one of two levels: "Wood-burning prohibited" or "Please Burn Cleanly."

When wood burning is prohibited, all residential wood burning -- including fireplaces, wood-burning inserts and heaters, pellet stoves and outdoor devices such as fire pits -- is prohibited. When the forecast is "Please Burn Cleanly," the district encourages residents to use manufactured fire logs or dry, seasoned wood. Gas fireplace use is always allowed.

Residential wood burning is the single largest source of harmful particulate matter during winter and can pump 17 tons of it into Valley skies daily. Fine-particulate matter (PM2.5) exacerbates respiratory illness, such as asthma; causes lung infections and bronchitis; and has been correlated with increased risk of heart attacks and stroke.

There are two exceptions to wood-burning prohibitions:

If the residence does not have access to natural-gas service, even if propane is used; or If burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for the residence.

Violators of the program are subject to fines.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available each day at 4:30 p.m. at [valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm](http://valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm), or by calling 1-800 Smog Info (766-4463), or by subscribing to the district's daily air quality forecast at [valleyair.org/lists/list.htm](http://valleyair.org/lists/list.htm).

Details: (559) 230-6000, [valleyair.org](http://valleyair.org).