

Tulare County wood-burning restrictions in place

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2013

While the weather is getting chilly enough to you might want to light your fireplace or wood stove, you may not be allowed to do it.

That's the because the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District has begun its annual "Check Before You Burn" program, which prohibits the use of wood-burning fireplaces in some Valley counties based on daily checks of air quality.

The first restrictions in some of the counties began on Sunday, and a restriction has been imposed today in Tulare County.

"The curtailment applies to burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs in residential fireplaces, stoves and outdoor burning devices such as fire pits and chimineas," states a press release from the district.

Violators can be fined, but exceptions are allowed for homes that don't have connections to natural gas service — even if propane is used — or if burning solid fuel is a home's sole heating source.

To find out if a burn restriction is in place in Tulare County or if one is imposed for the next day, go online to www.valleyair.org/CBYB.

Fireplace use prohibited Wednesday for most of Kern

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2013

Air district officials are prohibiting fireplace use Wednesday throughout the San Joaquin Valley base portion of Kern County, including Bakersfield.

The prohibition is brought on by poor air quality.

Burning wood, pellets and manufactured fire logs in residential fireplaces, stoves and outdoor burning devices like fire pits and chimneys, is prohibited.

Fireplace use is allowed, however, in the Frazier Park area.

Violators of the ban can be fined.

For more information, visit www.valleyair.org.

Propane proves promising for aging school bus fleet

Cleaner, quieter than diesel, cheaper than natural gas

Stockton Record, Sunday, Nov. 10, 2013

SAN ANDREAS - Down in the cities, riding to school isn't nearly as stinky as it used to be. California air pollution rules and concerns over the toxic compounds in diesel exhaust have already prompted school districts from Los Angeles to Lodi to switch to either alternative fuels or highly filtered diesel systems.

Out in rural areas, such as Calaveras County, however, there are still some decades-old diesels that offer a whiff of old times.

"We have one of the oldest bus fleets in the nation," said Tessie Reeder, transportation supervisor for Calaveras Unified School District.

Reeder recently told Calaveras Unified trustees that buses the district owns have an average age of 19 years, while the ones still in regular use have an average age of 17 years.

That fleet includes nine 1993 buses that have 400,000 miles on them and whose outdated diesel engines can't feasibly be retrofitted with filters that will meet a California Air Resources Board standard due to go into effect Jan. 1, 2018.

That puts Calaveras County in a bind. With a shrinking student population and the cuts in state funding since 2008, the district doesn't have a pot of money for new buses, which cost around \$108,000 each.

Plus, diesel is getting pricey. So the district last week tested a propane-powered bus. Propane is cheaper than diesel or gas, burns cleaner, and could qualify the district for state or federal grants to help pay for new buses.

"We are going to be in a predicament in 2018 if we don't do something now," Reeder said.

Josh Browning, transportation fleet manager for Calaveras Unified, said that on his initial drive with a propane bus, he noticed how much quieter the motor is. That means a safer situation for a driver who can hear more of what's happening inside and outside the bus, he said.

Still, propane doesn't deliver quite the horsepower of diesel, and Calaveras Unified buses at times have to travel up and down steep hills, he said.

Grants were a big help for other area districts that have been switching to less-polluting buses. Stockton Unified School District in 2010 received a San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District grant that paid most of the \$4.2 million to buy 43 new buses using clean-diesel technology that reduces emissions about 90 percent over conventional diesel.

And Lodi Unified School District for more than a decade has been gradually converting its fleet to one operated on compressed natural gas.

Tim Hern, the chief business officer for Lodi Unified, said 42 of the district's 81 buses run on natural gas, and the district is in the midst of buying 12 more with the help of a California Department of Transportation grant.

"We have our own fueling station, and we are going to be expanding that to be able to handle more of the buses and also to be available to the public to fuel cars that run off the natural gas," Hern said.

Those compressed natural gas fueling stations are pricey, however. Calaveras Unified officials said it might cost \$600,000 to \$1 million to set one up, too much for a rural school district.

Propane, in contrast, is relatively inexpensive to handle, Browning said. He said that right now he'd be able to get propane for about \$1.26 a gallon, versus the approximately \$3.59 a gallon the district is paying for diesel.

"And, it's zero emission," Browning said of propane.

With nine diesel buses needing to be retired by 2018, Calaveras officials say they need to buy at least two cleaner-burning buses each year until then.

Fireplace burning prohibited Sunday in portions of Valley

By Carmen George – The Fresno Bee
Merced Sun-Star, Sat. November 9, 2013

Woodstove and fireplace burning will be prohibited in much of the San Joaquin Valley on Sunday due to poor air quality.

The day-long restriction, ending at midnight Sunday, applies to the Valley portions of Kern, Fresno and Kings counties, said officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The prohibition applies to burning wood, pellets or manufactured fire logs in fireplaces and stoves, along with outdoor burning, such as fire pits and chimineas. Violating the mandate can result in fines.

However, burning is allowed if a residence doesn't have natural-gas heating, even if propane is used, or if burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for a residence, officials said.

The restrictions help limit elevated coarse particulate matter in the air, officials said, which worsens respiratory illnesses such as asthma, and causes lung infections and bronchitis.

Sunday's ban is the first burning restriction of the season for the Valley portions of Fresno and Kern counties.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available each day at 4:30 p.m. online at valleyair.org/CBYB, by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO (766-4463), or by subscribing to the air district's daily air quality forecast at valleyair.org/lists/list.htm. A free iPhone app, Valley Air, is available at iTunes and the App Store. More information is available by calling the Fresno air district office at (559) 230-6000.