

Bans on burning wood fall by 50%

By Mark Grossi

In the Fresno Bee, Merced Sun-Star, and other papers, Sat., March 2, 2013

FRESNO -- Bans on burning wood in fireplaces have plummeted more than 50 percent in the San Joaquin Valley -- the benefit of better air movement compared to the stagnant winter of 2011-12.

But on 42 days this winter, the air still violated the federal particle pollution standard somewhere in the valley, according to the California Air Resources Board.

Residents in the eight-county region, ranging from Stockton to Bakersfield, are cooperating when burning bans are called, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Citations for violating the wood-burning ban dropped more than 50 percent.

"Valley residents have come to understand the serious health consequences of residential wood burning and support this critical regulation," district executive director Seyed Sadredin said. "Our improving winter air quality reflects that."

Wood-burning bans ended this week for the season, which runs from November through February.

Soot, diesel particles, chemicals and other microscopic specks called PM-2.5 are linked to asthma, heart problems and the early death of hundreds of valley residents each year.

Wood burning in cities is one of the valley's biggest PM-2.5 problems -- which rank among the worst in the country.

A decade ago, the district passed a rule curtailing wood burning when air quality deteriorates. It prevents buildups of the specks. Since then, violations, pollution concentrations and unhealthy days have dropped.

But this region is a natural trap for pollution because of surrounding mountains and episodes of stagnant weather. In the dry, cold month of December 2011, for instance, there were 29 consecutive days when PM-2.5 exceeded the federal standard somewhere in the valley.

In the last four months, Fresno and Kern counties had the most bans on wood burning, as they did in the previous winter. Fresno County had 43 this season, 68 last. Kern had 36 this season, 56 last.

Overall in the valley, there were 187 bans this winter, 381 last year.

Improved air quality leads to fewer burning bans

Staff reports

The (Fresno) Business Journal, Fri., March 1, 2013

There were fewer residential wood-burning bans this winter thanks to healthier air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

As part of its wintertime Check Before You Burn program, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issues wood-burning curtailments as a response to pollution levels in the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern.

The program, which ended its 10th season on Feb. 28, saw 187 such bans this past winter compared to 381 the year before.

Fresno County residents were issued 43 curtailments in the latest season compared to 68 the previous year. Tulare County went from 54 bans to just 24 while Kings County dropped from 49 to 27 and Madera County went from 41 to just six.

District-wide, there were only three days during the latest winter when air quality was considered "unhealthy" in any county compared to 41 such days the previous winter.

Also, the number of days when air quality was rated "unhealthy for sensitive groups" decreased by 54 percent over the previous winter.

"We owe a great deal of gratitude to Valley residents for their cooperation and the resulting improvements in air quality," said Sayed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Check Before You Burn runs each winter from November through February in order to help reduce seasonal particulate matter that has been shown to cause lung infections, respiratory disease and other health effects.

As part of the program, the air district requires all Valley residents call 1-800-SMOG INFO (766-4463) or go online to valleyair.org/aqinfo/woodburnpage.htm to find out if it's safe to use their fireplaces or wood stoves.

Better air quality so far this winter, say smog police

Central Valley Business Times, Fri., March 1, 2013

With spring finally in the air, the Valley's air pollution experts look back on the depths of winter with favor.

They say Friday that there was dramatically improved air quality in the San Joaquin Valley air basin portion of the Central Valley this winter resulting in fewer residential wood-burning curtailments than during the previous season.

The annual wintertime program that reduces particle pollution ended its 10th season Feb. 28.

During the 2012-13 season, there were 187 curtailments District-wide (San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties).

This compares to 381 curtailments during the 2011-12 season, representing a decrease of over 50 percent Valley-wide, in the number of curtailment days from last season.

There were just three days during this winter when air quality was "unhealthy" in any county, compared to 41 such days last winter, according to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Also, the number of days when air quality was rated "unhealthy for sensitive groups" decreased by 54 percent over last winter.

"We owe a great deal of gratitude to Valley residents for their cooperation and the resulting improvements in air quality," says Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

Valley sees fewer wood-burning bans this winter

By Laura Liera, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Sat., March 2, 2013

Improved winter air quality led air officials to declare fewer no-burn days this season.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District announced Friday that during the 2012-13 winter season, there were 187 instances across the eight-county district when wood burning was banned, compared to 381 during the 2011-12 season.

"We now have a more informed population that understands or has some knowledge of the air quality issues that affect everyone," said air district spokeswoman Janelle Schneider.

The Check Before You Burn program, which runs from November to February, curtails residential wood burning when air quality is bad in order to prevent a build-up of fine-particulate matter, known as PM2.5. The program has been in effect since 2003. Each day the district announces if wood burning is prohibited, or if it's allowed but residents are urged to burn cleanly.

Maria Isabel Garcia, 77, a Bakersfield resident, thinks Check Before Your Burn is needed to help improve the air.

"For the past two years I have been coughing and having allergies that have affected my sleeping patterns," Garcia said. "I was able to breathe without a problem or a cough back when I used to work in the cotton fields in 1982 but now, look at me."

But others don't think banning fireplace or other residential wood burning is a good idea.

"During the winter, I burned my wood-burning fireplace almost every day because it's my right," said Yolanda Watson, 48, a Bakersfield resident. "It's a lot cheaper to burn than to pay a PG&E bill."

According to Watson and other residents, the way to cleaner air isn't in regulating days people can and can't burn.

"A lot of the bad air in the valley is caused by the air we get from surrounding places, so controlling when people can or can't use their chimney is a waste of time," said Bakersfield resident Tammy Jones. "Clean air is necessary but chimneys aren't the biggest problem."

The air district has its own forecast team that pays attention to wind speed and direction, as well as any high or low pressure systems that may occur throughout the valley.

"We target days where the local contribution overwhelms sources of air pollution," said Stephen Shaw, supervising air quality specialist at the district.

An example of this would be when the smoke of a chimney rises above 15 to 20 feet and then loops around and produces a cloud over a neighbor's lawn or house.

"The air is unstable and there's a lot of different mixings in it already, so when you add chimney smoke, you increase the source of PM2.5 particles," he said.

And the increase in particles in the air can cause a range of health problems, such as allergies or asthma, according to Shaw.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency calls these harmful particles PM2.5, small particles of soot, ash and other airborne material that can penetrate deep into the lungs. They have been linked to a wide range of serious health problems, including premature death and heart attacks, as well as acute bronchitis and aggravated asthma among children.

This winter, there were just three days when air quality was "unhealthy" in any county of the eight-county air district, which includes the valley portion of Kern, compared to 41 such days the previous winter, the air district announced.

Residents who violate the no wood-burning days face a citation of \$50, or higher, depending on previous citations.

"We respond to public complaints and inspectors that we have around areas, so if you don't want to receive a notice of violation, follow the rules and don't burn," Schneider said. "We are all breathing the same air and it's nice to be able to breathe clean air into our lungs."

Fireplace burn restrictions end for season

Stockton Record, Sun., March 3, 2013

The season for fireplace burning restrictions ended Friday, and San Joaquin County saw fewer burn bans this winter than last.

Fireplace burning was prohibited 21 times in San Joaquin County, compared with 29 times last winter.

Eighty-four violation notices were issued to burners, compared with 88 notices last winter.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported that the Valley as a whole saw "dramatically" improved air quality this winter, requiring fewer frequent burn restrictions.