

Wood-burning ban now in effect in valley

Modesto Bee, Wednesday, January 23, 2013

CENTRAL VALLEY -- The season's first valleywide wood-burning prohibition is in effect through midnight today, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said Tuesday.

The initial prohibition, coming relatively late in the season, began at midnight Tuesday and includes Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and part of Kern County.

It applies to residential wood-burning (including pellets and manufactured fire logs) and outdoor fire pits and chimineas.

The forecasts are issued by county, and there are two levels: "Wood Burning Prohibited" or "Please Burn Cleanly." When a prohibition is declared, burning any solid fuel in a residential fireplace or wood-burning device is not permitted. There are two exceptions:

- The residence does not have access to natural gas service.
- Burning solid fuel is the sole source of heat for the residence.

Forecasts are issued daily at 4:30 p.m. and are available at www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/woodburnpage.htm or by calling (800) 766-4463.

Air district sets Valley-wide wood-burning ban

By Diana Aguilera - The Fresno Bee

Fresno Bee Tues., Jan. 23, 2013

Poor air quality has prompted the season's first Valley-wide wood-burning prohibition, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said.

The ban applies to residential wood burning, including pellets and manufactured fire logs, and to outdoor fire pits. Violators can be fined.

Wood burning can produce soot and other fine matter that can cause lung infections, respiratory ailments and cancer, and can worsen cardiac health.

The prohibition is in effect starting at midnight Tuesday through midnight today in all eight Valley counties: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portions of Kern.

Residents may be exempted from the ban if they do not have access to natural gas heating or if burning solid fuels is the sole source of heat.

Air officials call season's first valleywide wood-burning ban

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2013

Bad air quality in eight counties, including the valley portion of Kern County, has prompted the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to implement the season's first valleywide wood-burning ban.

The ban is in effect beginning at midnight Tuesday and continuing through midnight Wednesday, according to an air district news release. It covers the counties of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern (excluding Frazier Park).

The prohibition, the air district news release said, applies to residential wood burning, including pellets and manufactured fire logs, and also applies to outdoor fire pits and chimineas.

Mandatory bans might continue depending on air quality, the air district warned.

The Check Before You Burn program runs from November through February. Air district officials noted that it's late in the season to just now have the first valleywide ban. It's aimed at reducing the amount of particulate matter in the air.

When burning is prohibited, you can't burn any solid fuel in a residential fireplace or wood-burning device.

There are two exceptions:

- * If a 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.

Check for the latest at <http://www.valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnpage.htm>, call 1-800 SMOG INFO (766-4463) or subscribe to the daily air quality forecast at <http://www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm>.

Air officials declare season's first Valley-wide wood-burning ban

Hanford Sentinel, Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2013

Deteriorating air quality has prompted the season's first Valley-wide wood-burning prohibition. The mandatory curtailments may continue, depending on air quality, Air District officials said.

The initial prohibition, coming relatively late in the season, is in effect beginning at midnight tonight and continuing through midnight Wednesday in San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties (excluding Frazier Park). The prohibition applies to residential wood burning (including pellets and manufactured fire logs), and also applies to outdoor fire pits and chimineas.

Check Before You Burn runs each winter from November through February and reduces wintertime particulate matter (PM) by restricting the use of wood-burning devices when air quality is poor. PM includes small pieces of ash, soot, liquid droplets and other airborne matter, and causes lung infections, respiratory disease and cancer, and exacerbates cardiac disease, causing heart attacks and stroke.

Wood-burning forecasts are issued by county and there are two levels of forecast: "Wood Burning Prohibited" or "Please Burn Cleanly." When a prohibition is declared, burning any solid fuel in a residential fireplace or wood-burning device is not permitted.

There are two exceptions, however:

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.

Prohibition violations are subject to fines.

Lawsuit filed against Fresno private waste plan

By Michael Kincheloe

Business Journal Tues., Jan. 22, 2013

A group of local residents is suing the city of Fresno, claiming that its environmental assessment of residential solid waste privatization does not meet the measure required by state law.

Fresnans for Clean Air (FRESCA) filed suit Tuesday at Superior Court in Fresno contesting certain issues in the city's Negative Declaration for Environmental Assessment. The group claims that private waste hauler Mid-Valley Disposal's transporting of the garbage to Kerman rather than within the Fresno city limits will impact air quality and traffic.

The group also claims that the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District failed to require preparation of an environmental impact report and did not allow the public to participate in the process.

"I am saddened that the mayor and the city council decided to trivialize the environmental impact of their rushed decision to privatize our city's residential trash collection," said Howard K. Watkins, a Fresno attorney.

Watkins claims that Mayor Ashley Swearengen and that a majority of the Fresno City Council avoided community involvement in the issue, and that an improper assessment was done on the environmental impact to communities like West Fresno, which is along the route the trucks would take to dispose of the waste at Mid-Valley's processing site in Kerman.

FRESCA, which was founded last Friday, wants the city to rescind its deal with Mid-Valley or to "fully comply" with what it says are violations of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

City of Fresno officials today released the following statement regarding the suit:

"The City is prepared to address each issue raised by its residential solid waste labor unions and is confident the franchise process undertaken by the City was within its Charter and statutory authority. The proposal essentially maintains services involving the same routes and same trucks, although at lesser rates to the public."

NASA spirals over Valley to test air quality

By Tim Sheehan, staff writer

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 22, 2013

For the past week, residents in the central and southern San Joaquin Valley may have noticed a low-flying airplane cruising overhead several times a day -- sometimes quite low to the ground.

NASA researchers are using the four-engine airplane, loaded with scientific instruments, to get a better idea of the Valley's winter air pollution patterns at various altitudes. The idea is to figure out better ways for satellites to measure air pollution on and above the ground.

NASA, the agency that never met an acronym it didn't like, calls the mission DISCOVER-AQ, which stands for Deriving Information on Surface Conditions from Column and Vertically Resolved Observations Relevant to Air Quality.

Bee reporter Tim Sheehan is aboard the NASA P-3B airplane Tuesday as it flies from NASA's Dryden Flight Operations Facility in Palmdale to test the Valley's air.

Supervisors push for near, far-term resolution of oil-ag conflict despite petroleum industry concerns

By John Cox, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2013

County supervisors overrode objections by the petroleum industry Tuesday and ordered staff to begin crafting an interim public process for resolving land-use conflicts between oil producers and local growers.

With the same unanimous vote, the Board of Supervisors also launched a review that could allow the county to take over the state's lead role in permitting oil projects in California's most productive petroleum region.

The board's action sets in motion short- and long-term proposals for resolving what has become a highly visible dispute between the two main drivers of the local economy.

While the long-term plan enjoyed broad support -- including that of the state's senior oil regulator, who made the trip from Sacramento to speak to the board Tuesday -- a top oil industry representative asked

the board to delay work on the short-term proposal so the industry could continue negotiating with growers.

"Our industry remains concerned about certain aspects of the proposal," said Western States Petroleum Association President Cathy Reheis-Boyd. As an example, she said the proposed hearings should not apply to conflicts over projects in established oil fields.

The board rejected her request, saying all sides' interests will be taken into account in a proposal expected to return to the board in March or April.

Speaking to an audience that included representatives of the county's biggest oil producers, Supervisor David Couch said he hesitated to initiate any form of government intervention.

"We may have gotten to a point where that is unfortunately necessary," he said.

In a sense, the supervisors had little choice but to proceed with work on an interim proposal. In December, board members promised ag community representatives that they would take specific action to resolve the conflict at Tuesday's meeting.

Ag community spokesman Larry Moxley lauded the board's decision to move forward with the short-term proposal.

"That forces us all to stay at the table cooperatively," he said after the vote.

According to the staff report by county Planning Director Lorelei Oviatt, the short-term proposal would require mineral rights owners such as oil and gas producers to work out land use details with surface property owners, primarily growers. If their talks reach an impasse -- and if it's unrelated to the issues of financial compensation or environmental impacts -- then either party could appeal to the Board of Supervisors for a final ruling.

Souring relationship

Relations between Kern's two biggest industries turned frosty in about 2010 when oil producers led by Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum Corp. began drilling in orchards and agricultural fields near Shafter. Growers complained that Oxy and other mineral rights owners were setting up drilling operations without considering the impact on the farmers.

Historically, California law has left mineral rights owners and surface property owners to their own devices, including lawsuits, to settle such conflicts. The county has generally avoided involvement.

In November, a growers group named the Committee to Protect Farmland and Clean Water asked the Board of Supervisors to intervene, claiming oil companies were not only impeding their farming activities but also threatening their groundwater with hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," and underground injections of waste materials.

The committee's claims have taken on greater importance because of a series of lawsuits filed last year by California environmentalists and individual growers. They accuse state regulators of performing inadequate environmental reviews that favor oil producers over farmers. Related suits seek a statewide ban on fracking, the highly effective but potentially polluting oil field practice.

The state's senior oil regulator, Mark Nechodom, director of the state Department of Conservation, said in an interview Tuesday that he supports a review of whether it is time for the county to take on primary responsibility for permitting local oil projects. But, he added, "we have not prejudged this in any way."

"We want oil and ag to sit down and work its way through what makes sense."

Kern's oil industry has endorsed the concept of giving the county greater responsibility for approving local drilling projects. The industry's stated priority is regulatory certainty: a clear path to project approval without additional red tape.

Long-term proposal

The long-term solution proposed in Oviatt's staff report -- a strictly administrative process for issuing oil field permits -- would rule out concerns about fracking and underground injections as a basis for stopping

drilling projects. But first there would need to be an exhaustive county review of the state's oil well construction standards and environmental mitigation measures.

If the process goes as Oviatt has proposed, there will be no public hearings on local oil projects and no need for the county to issue conditional use permits.

All of this would take time and money, and as of Monday it was unclear who would pay the several million dollars it would cost to conduct the year-and-a-half environmental review needed before the county could take over the state's oil permitting authority.

On Tuesday the answer emerged: The cost would be split among California's top three oil industry associations, the Western States Petroleum Association, the California Independent Petroleum Association and the Independent Oil Producers Agency.