

Air Pollution: More money, smaller incentives for wood-burn program

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer

The deal's not quite as sweet, but Valley air cops have kicked in another \$3.6 million in incentives for residents willing to upgrade their old polluting wood stoves or fireplaces.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District already had made \$4 million available since the program started in October. The problem was the district had received more than \$6 million worth of applications from Stockton to Bakersfield — or about 80 to 100 requests per day.

So the district's Board of Directors last week unanimously approved the latest in a trio of cash infusions. This time, however, officials are reducing each incentive from \$1,500 to \$1,000 to make the money last as long as possible.

Even those who have applied for what they expect to be a \$1,500 voucher will be eligible only for the lower amount.

"We just felt that in order to see this program last, hopefully, through January and into the rest of the winter season, we really have to be strategic with the numbers," district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said. People currently on waiting lists can opt out if they're not satisfied with the lower incentive, she said.

A \$1,000 incentive still is much larger than the district used to offer. Residents can get an additional \$500 for upgrading to a gas unit, for a total incentive of \$1,500. And low-income residents remain eligible for a \$2,500 incentive or \$3,000 if they go with gas.

For those who were hoping for the \$1,500 incentive, "We say we're sorry," Holt said. "It was first-come, first-served at that higher level. This was just much more successful than we originally thought."

San Joaquin County residents collectively have applied for almost \$1.5 million in incentives, more than any other Valley county with the exception of Fresno. Since money is allocated based on each county's population, residents here may be seeing longer wait times before they receive vouchers from the air district, Holt said.

But they can continue to apply and could receive vouchers in perhaps a couple of months, Holt said. There is no shortage of open fireplaces and old wood stoves in the Valley, which are blamed for high levels of tiny particle pollution during the winter.

Said Holt: "We have every intention of carrying this program into next year."

Tracy girl's artwork showcased in calendar

Press staff report

Tracy Press, Saturday, Dec. 20, 2014

The 2015 Healthy Air Living Kids' Calendar features artwork by a Tracy eighth-grader, Christina Nuqui.

Christina, who attends Kelly School, is one of 15 students whose illustrations were chosen by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District from hundreds of submissions for the calendar. Her entry reads, "Be a hero to our air, and just walk."

The district distributes 20,000 copies of the calendar free to regional nonprofits, schools and organizations.

For more information, email public.education@valleyair.org or call the Modesto district office, 557-6400.