

Free smog-testing Saturday for vehicles in Fresno

Fresno Bee, Thursday, Oct. 29, 2015

Valley residents can get their cars smog-tested at no charge this Saturday in a clean-air event at the Fresno Fairgrounds.

The Tune In & Tune Up testing offered by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley CAN (Clean Air Now) will be from 8 a.m. to noon at the fairgrounds, 1121 S. Chance Ave. in southeast Fresno. To qualify, drivers need to have owned their cars for at least six months. If the vehicle doesn't pass the test, the owner will get a voucher for smog repairs at a qualifying smog service shop. Drivers are encouraged to arrive early because of limited vehicle capacity, and testing will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis.

Local community groups will have information booths at the event, and free food and drinks will be provided starting at 9 a.m. while supplies last.

Details: 800-806-2004 or email TITUevent@valley-can.org.

Valley winter wood-burning ban starts again Sunday

By Andrea Castillo

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, October 28, 2015

For the second winter, most San Joaquin Valley residents wanting to use their fireplaces and wood-burning stoves have two options: invest in clean-burning devices or keep them turned off.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued new rules on wood burning last year. And once again, the district invested millions of dollars in clean-burning wood stoves and inserts, which filter out dangerous particles.

The burn ban starts Sunday and continues through the end of February.

During winter months, 30 percent of dangerous particle pollution comes from wood fires in city neighborhoods. Particle pollution, known as PM 2.5, is responsible for hundreds of premature Valley deaths and can lead to a host of other significant health issues, including pulmonary heart disease and cancer. Soot is one of the biggest problems because it is concentrated where people live.

"Wood smoke is one of the most dangerous pollutants that you can expose yourself, your children and your neighbors to," said Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director.

Residents are restricted from lighting wood fires when local particle pollution is higher than 20 micrograms per cubic meter of air. That's stricter than the previous threshold of 30 micrograms. But those using the cleanest-burning devices registered with the district are allowed to burn wood until pollution gets above the 65-microgram level.

People using open fireplaces and old burning devices are barred from lighting them for most of the season. Those with the clean-burning devices were stopped only six times last winter.

There are two exceptions to the restrictions. Burning is allowed freely for those with no other source of heat or no access to natural gas service. But air district officials will consider regulating those situations as they come up with a new plan next year to comply with ever-tightening federal standards.

The Valley exceeded the daylong federal particle standard of 35 micrograms on 45 days last year, nearly a 37 percent drop from the previous year but still more than the South Coast Air Basin, which had 25 bad days.

In last year's "State of the Air" report from the American Lung Association, Fresno, Visalia and Bakersfield ranked in order as the three dirtiest cities in the country for particle pollution. That includes soot, dust, chemicals and microscopic debris, which come from fireplaces, vehicles, farming and industrial processes.

The district is using \$7 million in grant funds to help residents buy certified fireplace inserts and stoves, as well as convert to natural gas-fired fireplaces. The inserts incinerate more of the particles so they produce less smoke. Grants are \$1,000 or \$2,500 for low-income applicants, plus \$500 for anyone toward installation costs on a natural gas device.

Only about 3,000 devices were registered last year, which covers a little more than 1 percent of the Valley's households with fireplaces. Air district spokeswoman Jaime Holt said just 400 devices are registered so far this year. She said that's because of the unseasonably high temperatures this month.

"We really don't start to see people get interested in the program until they need to use those devices," she said.

Holt said the new rules were created to save 5.1 tons of particle pollution per day. She said there has been a drop in pollution, but it will take a couple more years to realize the full impact of the rules.

Plus, a lung association analysis released in April revealed the drought is making the Valley's already unhealthy air worse.

"Emissions are down, but because of the drought, the actual air quality has not seen those same improvements," Holt said.

Anyone caught breaking the rules can get a notice of violation. The violations can result in fines that start at \$100 for the first offense – which can be reduced to \$50 if the offender attends a class on the importance of following wood-burning rules – and increase to as much \$1,000 for subsequent penalties. Violation notices dropped 14 percent last year from 537 in 2013.

The air district issues a daily wood-burning status by county. Residents can sign up for daily email status notifications at www.valleyair.org/CBYB. Updates are also available by phone at 1-800-SMOG INFO (766-4463) or on the free iPhone app called Valley Air.

Winter air pollution controls kick in next week

Central Valley Times, Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2015

Sunday brings two major changes to the Central Valley. First, the clocks get turned back by an hour. But also Sunday, wood-burning fireplaces cannot be used except in rare instances.

"Wood smoke is one of the most dangerous pollutants that you can expose yourself, your children, and your neighbors to," says Seyed Sadredin, the district's executive director and air pollution control officer. "Prolonged exposure to wood smoke can lead to pulmonary arterial hypertension, pulmonary heart disease, heart failure and cancer."

Valley businesses, including farms and dairies have spent over \$40 billion on modernizing their facilities, installing clean air technologies, and complying with the toughest air regulations in the nation. As a result, air pollution from Valley businesses has been reduced by over 80 percent and currently smoke from residential wood burning constitutes the largest source of dangerous particulate emissions during winter months.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is offering incentives to Valley residents wishing to change out their older units with new gas-fired or EPA-certified wood burning devices which are 20 to 50 times cleaner.

This year, Valley residents that have invested in cleaner, certified wood burning devices will be allowed to have additional burn days if they register their devices with the Air District. Valley residents wanting to switch out older wood-burning devices for a cleaner model can take advantage of the District's grants which provide \$1,000 for certified wood, pellet inserts, freestanding stoves or natural gas inserts or \$2,500 for eligible low-income applicants for all devices. An additional \$500 is available to all applicants for the installation costs on a natural gas device.

There are two exceptions to wood-burning prohibitions: If the residence does not have another source of heat or if the residence does not have access to natural gas service (even if propane is used) then, they are exempt from the rule and may continue to use their device.