

## **Dust storms herald the arrival of cooler weather across Valley**

By Matt Leedy  
The Fresno Bee

*(Published Thursday, October 30, 2003, 5:47 AM)*

Dust storms blew into the Valley on Wednesday and settled like a brown-tinged fog, creating unhealthful air and signaling the beginning of cooler weather.

High winds that powered the dust storms were accompanied by a cold front that could drastically reduce temperatures for the rest of the week and possibly bring rain by Halloween.

The unusually dark skies early Wednesday evening were not caused by fires ravaging Southern California, meteorologists said. Smoke from those fires should not reach the Valley because winds will push it elsewhere.

Dust storms that were recorded in Valley cities, including Fresno, Clovis and Corcoran, were likely caused by a combination of winds, freshly tilled fields and dry soil, said Michael Bingham, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford.

High readings of particulate matter, likely coarse wind-driven dust, were registered about 4 p.m., said Shawn Ferreria, an air pollution meteorologist for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The air quality in Clovis, for example, was unhealthful for sensitive groups from 4 to 5 p.m.

Similar readings were recorded in Fresno at Shields and Dakota avenues.

Winds whipped through the Valley at 20 to 35 mph, with the strongest gusts blowing through the Interstate 5 corridor. Cold weather from western Canada also rolled into the area.

Temperatures reached 86 degrees Wednesday in Fresno but are expected to drop into the 70s today throughout the Valley. The highs will likely barely break into the 60s on Friday, when there is a 30% chance of rain.

"Looks like we might get some fall weather for a change," Bingham said.

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### **Letter to the Editor**

#### **Season's greetings**

#### **Fall and winter bring some special concerns for Valley's air quality.**

*(Published in the Fresno Bee - Thursday, October 30, 2003, 5:53 AM)*

We're a month into autumn, and that means Halloween, then Thanksgiving, then the winter holiday season, a new year, rain, fog, cooler temperatures.

It also means increased dust, soot and particulate matter in the Valley's air. The inversion layer that forms on many days traps pollution closer to the ground, where it is more easily inhaled.

The implications for the health of Valley residents is enormous -- and it falls most heavily on children.

They are at greater risk from air pollution than adults for a number of reasons. Children breathe more often than adults, 20 to 30 times per minute as opposed to the grown-up rate of about 15 times per minute. They spend more time outdoors than most adults, increasing their exposure. Their lungs are still developing, which exacerbates the effects of pollution.

Fully 10% of the Valley's population suffers from a respiratory ailment. One child in six in Fresno County suffers from asthma, the worst rate in the state.

That's something we all ought to think about this fall and winter, whenever we light a cozy fire in the fireplace, or run a leaf blower, or kick up dust in urban back yards and along country roads.

It really is about the kids. Too often that's a cliché in the mouths of adults, but in this case it is a painful -- and sometimes fatal -- reality. Please try to remember that as the leaves fall and the days turn colder.

**LASTGASP**

"We can't go on living this way.

And we won't."

Another in a series of Thursday editorials on the Valley's polluted air. Today: Pollution dangers shift in fall and winter.

### **Will no-burn restrictions ignite inferno?**

By ROBERT PRICE, Californian staff columnist

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The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday October 28, 2003, 09:45:21 PM

The gods gave mortals the gift of fire. It might be tough to convince mortals to give it back, even for only 20 nights or so this winter.

But the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will have to try.

Remember those "Please Don't Light Tonight" advisories last winter? In a significant development, the air district has dropped the word "please." The whole slogan is gone, actually, replaced by the more prosaic, authoritative "Check Before You Burn."

Central Valley air is bad, and not getting clean enough fast enough. So, in an effort to cut down on fine-particle emissions from wood smoke, we'll be banned from firing up the family hearth on a few particularly problematic nights.

On nights when warm upper air rides over cooler surface air, creating an inversion layer that prevents soot and dust particles from escaping into the atmosphere, we'll be notified: People from Arvin to Stockton will be prohibited from burning wood, wood pellets or manufactured fire logs from midnight until the following midnight.

The new fireplace restrictions will go into effect this Saturday and last through the end of February. There's no telling exactly when we might first be instructed to keep the home fires extinguished, but last year we had our first "don't light" advisory on Nov. 19.

How, you ask, does the air district intend to enforce the regulations? With its own chimney patrol. The people who monitor factory and other "stationary" sources of pollution will now also keep their eyes trained on residential neighborhoods for telltale puffs of smoke. They'll check out complaints from people who call in to report the smell of burning firewood on no-burn nights. And they'll be doing it 24 hours.

It might seem heavy-handed, but drastic times demand drastic measures. Wood-burning limits ought to make a difference, though.

In the late 1970s, Denver was violating national air-quality standards more than 200 days a year. Denver-area air-quality officials put limits on wood burning in 1986, and by 1990, the metro area was only moderately out of compliance on the standard for PM10, the airborne particles created by dust and soot. As a greater number of fireplace owners began to cooperate, and new programs and incentives kicked in, Denver's air improved further. It worked: Metro Denver hasn't violated PM10 standards since January 1993.

That's the sort of success story San Joaquin Valley air guardians would love to duplicate.

But it'll mean getting tough.

Consequently, the new wood-burning restrictions have teeth. People who burn on no-burn nights can be fined as much as \$1,000 per episode. That's for repeat or especially egregious offenders; first-time, small-scale offenders are more likely to be fined \$50.

Air-district reps won't knock on doors, though. "That's too dangerous," says Bob Kard, the district's chief of compliance. He knows: Air-quality management agencies in other places, including Seattle-Tacoma and Reno-Tahoe, have dealt with public fury. The word is out. Proceed with caution.

"The resistance is pretty obvious," Kard said. "People want to burn for aesthetic reasons."

They also want fires for warmth. They want fires because the family hearth fulfills something almost primal in people. And, no matter what the issue, they don't want the government following them through their front doors, figuratively or otherwise.

So air-district representatives will just take photographs (dark ones, most likely) and write reports. The citations will come in the mail.

Then, after the fact, and if necessary, air district reps will sit down and explain the issues to people, face to face.

They'll explain that particles from wood smoke can cause coughing, irritation and possible long-term lung damage. Smoke can be especially harmful to children, the elderly and people with lung problems such as asthma and emphysema.

They'll explain that all but the most efficient fireplaces actually create a net heat loss. Unless you're laying right next to the fire, you're likely to be chillier with a fire than without one.

If this fireplace season is anything like past years, Kern County will have about 24 "Don't Light" nights this fall and winter, more than any other valley county, based on the average number of bad-air nights over the past three seasons. Last year, Kern County would have had 18 no-burn nights.

The only people who get exemptions to the new rule are those who live above 3,000 feet, don't have natural gas service, rely on wood burning as their sole source of heat, or live in the eastern, desert side of Kern County.

The rest of us -- the 61 percent of those 1.1 million households between Arvin and Stockton that have fireplaces or wood-burning appliances -- will have to pay attention to newspapers, radio and

television for "don't light" bulletins. (Two other options: Call (800) SMOG-INFo or check [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).)

The chimney patrol will be keeping busy, especially this first year. The national cooperation rate on no-burn nights, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, is about 60 percent.

The San Joaquin Valley has the highest incidence of childhood asthma in the state. Here's hoping that uncooperative 40 percent will be able to set aside their primal need for fire and give some consideration to others' primal need to breathe.

## **Officials hope to land Navy fighter station**

By CHRISTINE BEDELL, Californian staff writer

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The Bakersfield Californian

Tuesday October 28, 2003, 09:45:20 PM

Kern County's Assembly members led a hearing in Bakersfield Tuesday on how to convince the military to base a new Navy fighter wing in the Central Valley.

While they were at it, meeting goers also brainstormed ways to try to save local bases from downsizing or closure when the Defense Department considers military realignments in 2005.

Valley officials are trying to get the under-development Joint Strike Fighter Wing based at the Lemoore Naval Air Station. They say housing the wing in the valley could generate 5,000 to 10,000 civilian jobs and up to \$1 billion for the economy.

The Navy, Marines and Air Force plan to purchase about 3,000 of the multi-role aircraft and receive them over the next decade. Other countries want them, too.

At the Select Committee on National Defense, Technology and Jobs hearing Tuesday, military and local elected officials agreed that quickly, they need to promote Lemoore's assets.

Without advocating Lemoore, because he's not allowed to, base Commander Robert Rutherford touted its good flying weather, closeness to several air, land and sea training ranges and distance from development.

Others agreed.

"It is an ideal location," said William Jeffers, director of the state Department of General Services and the Office of Military Support.

The military is expected to choose a site for the wing in the next few years. Its decision could depend on what happens during the next round of Base Realignment and Closure decisions.

Siting the wing in Lemoore could benefit the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake, if it's used as a support base, Phil Arnold of the China Lake Defense Alliance said in written comments to the committee.

Assembly members Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, and Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield, led the meeting as chairman and vice chairman of the select committee.

McCarthy called for joint meetings of California's state and federal legislators to work together on protecting -- and getting the military to expand -- the state's defense bases.

[Whatever's done, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District needs to know, district Program Manager Tom Jordan testified.](#)

## **City urges open hearing on plant sale**

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The Bakersfield Californian  
Tuesday October 28, 2003, 09:45:20 PM

City of Bakersfield officials want any state review of plans to open a power plant at Coffee Road and Rosedale Highway to be open to the public.

Vice Mayor David Couch and a contingent of city staff called for the public meeting Tuesday at a meeting of *The Californian's* editorial board.

Couch also wants a full environmental review of the impacts the project could have on the air, water and neighborhoods near the site.

The California Public Utilities Commission will decide whether Pacific Gas & Electric can sell the mothballed plant to North American Power Group.

Then, city officials said, North American would have to get permits to operate from agencies like the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board.

The Bakersfield City Council, led by Couch, has expressed repeated opposition to the sale and re-opening of the plant.

The relationship between the city and North American has turned sour and accusatory.

Couch said it is foolish to reopen a defunct plant that has become surrounded by a rapidly growing city.

"To fire it back up again just doesn't make sense," he said.

Jane Zachary, a spokeswoman for North American Power Group, said the group has the environmental issues with the site under control.

The plant sits near a large plume of toxic chemicals in the groundwater.

"We have nothing to fear from any environmental review process," she said. "We have legally, in writing, promised not to touch the groundwater until the Regional Water Quality Control Board says it's OK."

Zachary said North American is not sure what form review of the sale will take before the Public Utilities Commission.

City officials said the hearing is currently slated to be a private one -- not open to participation or comment by the public.

Zachary said the project is in the middle of a 60- to 90-day comment period in which the public is encouraged to express their concerns about the plant in writing.

"Our goal is to create a project that the community will embrace," she said.

City officials said they don't know enough about the plant or its proposed "biodiesel" power source to know whether the plant will be friendly to the community.

"People in the power industry do not use untested power sources," City Manager Alan Tandy said.

Zachary said North American wants to change that fact.

"Someone has to be the first," she said. "We believe this is the time and place to bring biodiesel fuel to Bakersfield."

[Visalia Times-Delta editorial, Oct. 30, 2003:](#)

**Flames out on fireplaces: A happy ending?**

Something romantic might have died when the fireplaces went out, true. If the result is easier breathing for all of us, it will be worth it.

This weekend, the long-discussed regulations about fireplace burning go into effect in the six-county area served by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The regulations will include prohibitions of all wood-burning in open-hearth fireplaces on days the district identifies as a risk to air quality. It will also include stages in which wood burning is discouraged. Various exemptions to the new rules are designed to prevent them from being a hardship.

We urge the public to view these steps in a positive light. They are not merely rules to force government intrusion further into our lives. They ought to be considered as incentives to help us all improve the Valley's air quality.

The air pollution control district and other monitors of air quality have known for many years that airborne ash from burning wood in fireplaces and some wood stoves contributes to air pollution in winter. The Valley's winter conditions often include an inversion layer of warmer air trapping colder, denser air near the ground. That's when dense Tule fog forms -- moisture is trapped near the ground, is cooled and condenses.

The same conditions, however, create very polluted air. The same smoky air, filled with ash from wood-burning fireplaces, lingers near the ground in the still air. On many a cold, foggy night, the pungent smell of wood-burning is clearly evident in the Valley air. That's the stuff making us choke, and it just hangs there.

Naturally, people would like to snuggle up to a warm fire on chilly nights. There are a lot of comforting things people do that might not be the best things for the environment. The public must do some things differently to save our air.

Those running for office in this election season are frequently asked what they will do to improve the Valley's air quality. Their answers sometimes include a reliance on new technology or policies that encourage less reliance on single-passenger vehicles. Almost all those answers also are accompanied by this message: People need to take some personal responsibility and improve air quality in their own daily routines.

Rather than rail against the loss of a crackling fire on winter nights, the people in the Valley ought to embrace this mission: Let's actively try to avoid using wood fires this winter and work on improving the air quality in the Valley. Let's use the new regulations as a benchmark to make people aware that it is possible to breathe freely in