

## Fireplace program wraps up for season

The Check Before You Burn fireplace and woodstove curtailment program concluded on February 28.

Check Before You Burn, which runs November through February each year, aims to reduce wintertime air pollution by discouraging or prohibiting the use of wood-burning devices such as fireplaces and inserts when air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

This season, wood burning was prohibited at least once in each of the eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley. The first-ever Valley-wide mandatory curtailment was issued Dec. 13. The final prohibition of the season was declared Feb. 14 for the valley portion of Kern County.

When the Air District adopted the program in 2003, it was anticipated that Valley residents could expect between four and 25 mandatory curtailments per season, depending on the county in which they live. The first two years of the program saw only two to three mandatory curtailments per season.

"The Valley experienced a more stagnant weather pattern this winter than last season," said Evan Shipp, supervisor of Air Quality Analysis for the Air District. "We had periods of high



pressure over the Valley, with weak winds and strong inversions, which allowed particulates to build up day after day," Shipp said. "Last year we had more dynamic weather systems that moved across the Valley and helped clear the air."

Through Check Before You Burn, wood burning in an open fireplace or older insert is discouraged when air quality is projected to be in the "unhealthy for sensitive groups" range, or an Air Quality Index (AQI) between 101 and 150. Wood burning is prohibited when air quality is expected to be unhealthy for everyone, or an AQI of 151 or higher.

The restrictions do not apply to natural-gas or propane devices; homes in areas with no natural-gas service; homes at elevations of

3,000 feet or higher; and homes in which no other heating device exists and wood burning is the sole source of heat.

The Air District's wood-burning rule has two other components aimed at improving wintertime air quality. It limits the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new residential developments and requires that any woodstove or fireplace insert left in a home when it is sold or transferred meet 1990 EPA emissions standards.

### Plan for "natural events" goes into action

Unusual weather and high winds in areas of Kern, Tulare and Kings counties prompted the Air District to issue a health cautionary statement on February 27.

Strong southeasterly winds, with gusts as high as 40 miles per hour, created unhealthy concentrations of particulate matter 10 microns and smaller (PM10) in the form of dust, according to a District meteorologist.

The District's air monitoring stations located in Corcoran and at Golden State Avenue in Bakersfield recorded elevated PM10 measurements that morning and quickly reduced visibility from five miles to just 300 feet because of blowing dust.

The health cautionary statement came just 11 days after Governing Board approved a "Natural Events Action Plan" (NEAP) that outlines a protocol to inform the public when unusual natural events occur. The purpose of the plan is to identify and minimize public exposure to these unusual events. The full text of the NEAP is available online on the District's website at [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

County	Days Prohibited 2005/06 season ('04/05)	Notices of Violation	Days Discouraged
Fresno	11 (2)	71 (26)	34 (44)
Kern (Valley only)	16 (2)	35 (10)	18 (37)
Kings	13 (0)	7 (0)	23 (6)
Madera	2 (0)	1 (0)	28 (13)
Merced	2 (0)	0 (0)	22 (15)
San Joaquin	1 (0)	9 (0)	14 (11)
Stanislaus	3 (0)	16 (0)	20 (28)
Tulare	9 (2)	20 (8)	28 (25)