

For Immediate Release:
October 30, 2003

Contacts: Kelly Hogan Malay, Bakersfield
(661) 326-6900
Anthony Presto, Modesto
(209) 557-6400
Josette Merced Bello, Fresno
(559) 230-5850

New residential wood-burning program begins this weekend Farmers must call to learn ag-burn status

A new wood-burning program designed to reduce air pollution created by fireplaces and wood heaters begins this weekend in all eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Also this weekend, the District will begin issuing the agricultural burn status to farmers by telephone only.

From Nov. 1 through Feb. 28, the Valley Air District will prohibit the burning of solid fuels in fireplaces and heaters when and where air quality is expected to be unhealthy (an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher). Residents are urged to "Check Before You Burn" in order to avoid fines and help improve air quality. Solid fuels include wood, pellets and manufactured firelogs. The restrictions don't apply to natural gas or propane devices.

Also beginning Nov. 1, the Air District will begin transitioning to a Smoke Management Program for farmers with agricultural burn permits. Instead of receiving the ag-burn status through public announcements, farmers can obtain the ag-burn determination for their specific crops and locations by calling the phone number on their permits.

The new fireplace and wood heater restrictions apply to residents and businesses in Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kings, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare and the Valley portion of Kern counties. The restrictions will be issued county-by-county depending on local air quality conditions. When a restriction is issued, it will be in effect for 24 hours --- from midnight to midnight on the affected day. Based on historical data, wood-burning restrictions likely will affect different counties between four and 25 days each season.

Starting Saturday afternoon, residents can find their county's daily wood-burning status by calling 1-800-SMOG-INFO (766-4463) or logging onto www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>>. The Air District also will provide the daily status to newspapers and radio and television stations valley-wide.

While most residences and businesses -- including lodges and restaurants - are subject to the prohibitions, exemptions apply to:

- Gas and propane devices or wood-burning cook stoves.
- Homes in which wood burning is the sole source of heat (no other heating device is built into the home).
- Devices used above 3,000 feet in elevation.
- Areas where natural gas service is not available.

Air District inspectors will perform surveillance and investigate complaints. Violations of the wood-burning prohibitions can result in fines. To avoid fines, Valley residents are encouraged to check before lighting a solid fuel fire.

To report violations, residents may call:

- 1-800-281-7003 in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties.
- 1-800-870-1037 in Madera, Fresno and Kings counties.
- 1-800-926-5550 in Tulare and the valley portion of Kern counties.

In order to prevent the need for mandatory restrictions, the Air District will notify the public when air quality is forecast to be unhealthy for sensitive groups (an Air Quality Index of 101 to 150). At that level, residents are asked to voluntarily refrain from burning solid fuels or to burn them as cleanly as possible by using EPA Phase II-certified devices, pellet stoves or manufactured firelogs. If air quality continues to deteriorate, the District will then issue mandatory restrictions.

When mandatory solid fuel-burning restrictions are not in place, residents can reduce air pollution caused by their wood fires by following these tips:

- Replace old solid fuel-burning equipment with cleaner Phase II or pellet-fueled devices. Or, install natural gas or propane devices, which are not subject to Air District wood-burning rules.
- Ensure firewood is clean, seasoned and dry before burning it. Green, unseasoned wood smolders and creates additional emissions.
- For an ambience fire in an open fireplace, a manufactured firelog may be a cleaner alternative to wood.
- Never burn trash, magazines, newspapers, plastics or other materials not designed to burn in a fireplace or stove. Doing so is illegal and hazardous.
- Burn denser woods. They take longer to ignite, but burn slower and more evenly.
- Keep fireplaces and wood stoves properly maintained. Chimneys should be cleaned and inspected periodically.