

## **Fireplace ban has yet to be evoked**

### **Voluntary efforts by Valley residents appear to be working**

By Percy Ednalino

Staff writer, Visalia Times-Delta

March 1, 2004

The district issued bans on two days that affected Fresno and Kern counties, however.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District spokeswoman Kelly Malay said the wood-burning season began on Nov. 1 and ended on Feb. 29.

The air board said it would issue a mandatory ban on the use of fireplaces and wood-burning stoves when the air quality index is unhealthy -- a reading of 151 or higher -- for all residents. The new rules on wood burning were adopted in 2003.

Malay said mandatory no-burn days were issued on Nov. 18 in Fresno County and the Valley portion of Kern County. Another no-burn day was ordered in Fresno County on Jan. 23.

"That's not to say Tulare County doesn't have air-quality issues," Malay said.

District officials originally expected between 20 and 25 mandatory no-burn days each season, based on measurements from previous winters.

The air board called for 60 voluntary no-burn days this season across the district. In Tulare County, only 23 voluntary no-burn days were issued. Fresno County led the district with 53 days in which wood burning was discouraged. Kern County followed with 49 days.

One of the reasons no-burn days were not issued in Tulare County was the weather, Malay said. Unlike past years, weather patterns in the county did not remain stagnant for long periods.

The other reason, Malay said, is the air board's education efforts appear to be working: Valley residents voluntarily stopped burning wood on days when wood burning was discouraged.

"That had a big impact on air quality, which is a good thing," Malay said. "Valley residents really stepped up to the plate this past wood-burning season."

During mandatory no-burn days this season, first-time offenders only received a letter informing them that they broke the ban. They were not fined unless they were caught violating the rule a second time.

Fines start at \$50. Multiple violators could receive a penalty of up to \$1,000.

Malay said the district received 60 reports of violations during the two no-burn days. Five of those complaints were filed in Kern County on Nov. 18. Malay said none of the violators were repeat offenders.

Residents who receive warning letters can apply for an exemption if no other heat source is available in the home or if they don't have access to natural gas service.

Those who live at elevations above 3,000 feet also are exempt because it's likely fireplaces and wood-burning stoves are the only source of heat.

Gas and propane stoves, along with wood-burning cooking stoves, also are exempt.

During the wood-burning season, investigators throughout the San Joaquin Valley monitor neighborhoods daily, especially on no-burn days.

If an investigator sees a violation, the incident is documented and processed. Residents are then mailed a letter informing them of the violation.

[Tulare Advance-Register column, Monday, March 1:](#)

### **On a clear day, whole Valley is visible**

By Bill Tweed

I saw something last week from the Sierra that I've never seen before -- the entire floor of the San Joaquin Valley.

In more than 30 years of living in the mountains of Tulare County, I'd never seen the air so clear that the complete Valley floor could be seen at one time. Now, at least once, I can say that I have.

The day was Tuesday the 17th, and park business took me on a morning drive from headquarters near Three Rivers to Grant Grove in Kings Canyon National Park. I took the usual winter route, dropping down the Kaweah canyons to Lemon Cove, then north up Dry Creek to Badger.

Between Badger and Pinehurst, as I often do, I diverged from the state highway to take a parallel county route called Hogback Road.

I like this quiet lane because it follows a ridgetop and offers nice views.

Last Tuesday morning, as I drove north along Hogback Road, I soon realized that I was seeing something special.

To the south and west, which is the direction the views go in that area, I could see not only the Sierra's foothills, but also the Valley floor and the Coast Range. On better-visibility days it's not uncommon to see these things, but last Tuesday was different. Not only could I see them, but I could see them in color.

I realized that as I looked across the Valley to coastal mountains more than 80 miles away, I could actually make out the difference between areas covered with grass and those supporting thicker, brushy vegetation. The grassy areas were still brown while the brush took on a bluish-green hue.

I was looking across the Valley to the southwest toward the mountains west of Coalinga. Following those ridges, I let my eyes sweep left, and higher mountains came clearly into view. I could see snow on their north-facing slopes and knew I must be looking at Mount Piños, an 8,800-foot peak located southwest of Bakersfield on the boundary between Kern and Ventura Counties.

Only the immediate terrain prevented me from seeing as far to the northwest, toward Los Baños and even Mount Diablo.

Even more amazing, however, was that I could see the entire sweep of farms and towns that forms the surface of the San Joaquin Valley. There, shining in the morning light, stood Visalia, Tulare, Hanford, Lemoore, Corcoran -- all surprisingly close together when viewed from 5,000 feet in the mountains.

Beyond them, if I'd had binoculars, I'm sure I could have picked out the commercial complexes along I-5 at Harris Ranch and Kettleman City.

There was not a wisp of haze or smoke over the entire Valley. Every detail of every Valley town was sharp and perfectly clear. The naked eye could follow highways, pick out big buildings like shopping centers and feed grain elevators, and see the endless checkerboard of agriculture.

During the winter it's not uncommon to see the Coast Range and even Mount Piños. But almost always, these distant ridges rise in silhouette above a hazy Valley, where only the closer portions can be seen.

Last week it was different. The full Valley was there to see, unobscured by even the slightest atmospheric blemish.

What was causing all this to happen, of course, was that early last week, Central California was falling under the sway of the powerful low-pressure cell that eventually brought us the rain that has fallen off and on for the past 10 days. It had not yet rained much the day I saw everything, but powerful winds were moving and mixing the Valley's air, scouring away the haze that almost never completely leaves our Valley.

The results were spectacular.

I wouldn't claim that years go by without occasional days like the one I'm describing, but these days of exceptional visibility are exceedingly rare. Literally, in some 30 years of running about in the local mountains, I had never seen a day this clear until last week.

Why our Valley is so hazy is a good question, and one I'll explore in another column. In the meantime, I've resolved to get back into the habit of carrying a camera with me whenever I drive around the parks.

You just never know when you're going to see something special.

*William Tweed is the chief naturalist at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. To ask him questions, write: William Tweed, Visalia Times-Delta, P.O. Box 31, Visalia, CA 93277.*

### [Political news and opinion related to air quality](#)

#### **Rubio points to his work as aide in Legislature, pledges to 'outwalk' rival**

Christine Bedell, Bakersfield Californian staff writer

February 29, 2004

Section: A Section; Page: a1

Michael Rubio walks briskly from one Rush Street home in southeast Bakersfield to another. He's in a blue "Rubio for Supervisor" sweatshirt and wearing out his second pair of precinct-walking shoes.

"Oh I'm sorry," he says to a reporter and campaign worker who have fallen behind. "I didn't mean to be rude."

Rubio, a 26-year-old aide to state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, has vowed to "outwalk" Parra and wants to add to his tally of 15,000 homes visited in eight months.

He knocks on the door of James and Lori Clemmons.

"I'm fulfilling a commitment to walk to every house in the 5th District," he tells them. "I want to get back to the basics of (enhancing) public safety, fixing roads, listening to the people."

James Clemmons complains about high workers' compensation costs and Democrats swinging too far to the left.

Rubio agrees. He offers to connect Clemmons with a local group writing a workers' comp reform ballot measure and asks for their support on March 2.

He's got it, Lori Clemmons later says.

"We just like him," she says. "We like his views, his values. And supervisors are involved in activities outside the county. He's going to stick with what he wants to do here."

Rubio has never held public office but stresses he's worked on air quality bills and stopping the state from wasting \$95 million on unneeded software.

And, friends point out, he has an up-from-the-bootstraps personal tale.

Rubio was born in Lost Hills, where his father was a farmworker. When he was in middle school, drought conditions caused his family to move to what he likes to call "the big city of Shafter."

Rubio's parents divorced and he, his younger sister and brother lived with his mom. At Shafter High School he was involved in football, baseball, wrestling, academic decathlon and the sheriff's Explorer program.

His best sport was baseball, his favorite position center field.

"You take control and lead the outfielders," he says. "In everything I've done I've tried to take the lead."

He sewed burlap sacks in a potato shed and fixed up and resold a pea-green, 1971 Datsun truck to save money for college. He worked through college, too, first while at Bakersfield College then at the University of New Haven, from which he graduated with a criminal justice degree in 1999.

In his senior year he interned and worked at the Department of Justice, where his bosses were investigating FBI agents.

In 2000, he joined the Peace Corps and for a little more than a month, worked on a Kenyan farm - including building a kitchen. But a drought hit there, too, and his unit disbanded.

Instead of going to another country, Rubio decided to run a family resource center in Shafter, which found children health insurance, clothes and food.

That's how he met Florez and, in 2001, became his executive assistant and then capitol director. Florez says he saw Rubio as a kind of diamond in the rough.

"He was an aggressive go-getter who set goals and reached them," Florez said.

Rubio helped pick the air quality bills Florez carried and pushed the senator to target mobile pollution sources like cars, Florez said. The two are close, he said, but often get things done very differently.

"I'm obviously brash and confrontational," Florez said. "Michael wants people to sit down in a room, look for things people agree on."

Rubio says he learned his work ethic from his father.

"I get up at 5 a.m. and hustle and bustle," he says.

Back on the campaign trail, Rubio's history with Florez proves to be a big plus when Rubio meets Alma and Henry Gonzales on Rush Street.

"I hope you lead like Dean has," Mrs. Gonzales says.

They tell Rubio people drive too quickly in their neighborhood. Rubio has a possible solution: In Shafter, officials installed temporary speed bumps and even after they were removed, drivers obeyed the limit.

"He seems to put in more of an effort," Alma Gonzales later says of Rubio.

But it turns out that Rubio's connection to Florez will cost him at least one vote.

He meets two men, who asked not to be identified. One supports Rubio; the other did until a week ago.

That's when Cal State Bakersfield administrator Thomas Martinez, whom the man has close ties to, accused Florez of threatening to cut university funding because of things Martinez has allegedly said about Florez's family.

Florez admits to calling Martinez but not threatening him or the system.

"I was going to vote for you until I read the paper," the man tells Rubio.

Rubio says he doesn't know what happened between Florez and Martinez and that he's on a leave of absence from Florez's office.

Rubio asks him to reconsider, saying someone's got to clean up the valley's air and he's determined to do it.

"I'm my own man, 100 percent," Rubio says. "Judge me for me, what I've done."

[Letter to The Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Feb. 29:](#)

## Endorses Boxer

I noticed that The Californian recently endorsed Bill Jones in the Republican primary for U.S. Senate. I think no matter whom the Republicans run for Senate, none of them can do as good a job of representing our state as Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer.

Boxer fights for the things Californians care about every day. Here in the Central Valley, where air pollution is of great concern and the Bush administration is systematically weakening the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and other pillars of environmental protection in our country, I say thank goodness we have Boxer in the Senate standing up to the polluters and protecting our families.

Lorraine Unger, Bakersfield

[Modesto Bee editorial, Monday, March 1:](#)

## Bush's spin on science undermines public confidence

There is a trust gap when it comes to the way the Bush administration presents -- some say distorts -- research collected by scientists.

Last month, 60 distinguished scientists and researchers wrote an open letter charging the Bush administration with "suppressing, distorting or manipulating the work done by scientists at federal agencies." What makes this report disquieting is the range and eminence of those who signed it. The Massachusetts-based Union of Concerned Scientists -- normally considered a liberal organization -- released the report. But among the signatories were

20 Nobel laureates and several advisers to past Republican presidents.

They say "the scope and scale of the manipulation, suppression and misrepresentation of science by the administration is unprecedented." And they cite examples:

In May 2002, the White House barred release of an Environmental Protection Agency report that showed 8 percent of women from 16 to 49 had blood levels of mercury that could reduce the IQ and motor skills of their children. Only when the report was leaked to reporters nine months later was it released by the White House. That gave the administration time to lobby against tighter restrictions on mercury emitted by coal-fired power plants.

Former Agriculture Department biologist James Zahn says that in 2001 and 2002, his superiors 11 times barred him from publicizing findings that [harmful bacteria float in the air surrounding industrial hog farms](#).

The White House made so many alterations in an EPA report on climate change last year that EPA Administrator Christie Whitman decided to publish the report without the climate-change section.

The administration let women believe abortion can raise the risks of getting breast cancer when the majority of scientists say it does not.

The administration's reputation in matters of science is so poor that several respected journals -- Science, Nature, the New England Journal of Medicine and Lancet -- have editorially blasted the government. And the president's own science adviser, John Marburger III, conceded recently that "given the prestige of some of the individuals who have signed on to this, I think they deserve additional response."

The administration must go beyond a response. It must take serious and substantive steps to establish greater oversight of how data is collected and used. The American public deserves to know the truth.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Monday, March 1:](#)

## **Pinched at the pump? Do something**

I was impressed by your strong criticism of the oil industry's price gouging in the name of refinery maintenance (Our Views, Feb. 25). Rather than complain about the situation, everyone has the opportunity to do something about this outrage.

I bought an electric hybrid vehicle. I have averaged 52 miles per gallon over the last two years and 34,500 miles. When I bought my car, I reduced my gas consumption by two-thirds. At \$1.50 per gallon, I paid 3 cents per mile for gas. At \$2 per gallon, I pay about 4 cents per mile. At \$3 per gallon, I will be paying less than 6 cents per mile.

The 2004 electric hybrids get up to 60 miles per gallon, yet are larger and more powerful than my car! Imagine paying only 5 cents per mile to drive when gasoline is \$3 per gallon!

For those who are not ready to purchase a new vehicle, your contribution to solving the problem of spot shortages -- whether real or contrived -- include carpooling, taking public transit and only driving when absolutely necessary.

Petroleum is a finite resource. Once it is used up, there will be none left. The sooner we start using gasoline wisely, the longer we all will have oil available.

Bruce R. Frohman, Modesto