

## **Fireplace use discouraged today**

Modesto Bee, Friday, Dec. 1, 2006

People in Stanislaus and Merced counties are asked not to use fireplaces and older wood stoves today because of concerns about air quality. Forecasters say the air will be unhealthy for sensitive people -- children, older adults and those with chronic breathing problems. The voluntary "burning discouraged" advisory comes from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The next step is a mandatory prohibition. On the Net: [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

## **Wildfire smoke sickens young, research finds**

**Even non-asthmatic children experience respiratory problems when exposed to soot and gases from blazes, USC study says.**

By Marla Cone, Times Staff Writer

LA Times, Friday, December 1, 2006

When wildfires sweep through Southern California, more than houses, trees and firefighters are in danger. Children, even healthy ones without asthma, suffer serious respiratory symptoms from breathing smoke, according to a USC study to be published today.

The researchers questioned the parents of nearly 5,000 children after the October 2003 wildfires that burned more than 1,000 square miles in Southern California, creating plumes of smoke.

Wheezing, coughing, colds, bronchitis, sore throats, sneezing and irritated eyes were among the children's symptoms. Many parents reported that their sons and daughters missed school and visited doctors' offices because of these problems.

The study suggests that children can stay healthier during wildfires if they limit outdoor activity and take other precautions recommended by public health agencies.

Asthmatics suffered the most symptoms, but there was also a high frequency of respiratory problems among children without the disorder -- so much so that many seemed as if they had asthma, the researchers reported in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

"One thing this study shows us is that during severe wildfires, children who do not have asthma may be experiencing what it is like to live with asthma," said Dr. Nino Kunzli, lead author of the study and an associate professor of preventive medicine at USC's Keck School of Medicine.

The study, involving first-, second-, and 12th-graders in 16 cities, is the first large-scale investigation of the consequences of wildfires on children's health.

Questionnaires were filled out by 4,609 parents who are participating in a long-term project researching the health effects of air pollution in Southern California and on the Central Coast.

Twelve of the communities were directly affected by the fires or had dense smoke. Of those, Upland, Mira Loma and San Bernardino recorded the worst smoke levels, although Long Beach, Riverside, San Dimas, Glendora and Anaheim were among others with smoky air.

During two weeks in 2003, multiple fires roared through all six Southern California counties, burning 1,200 square miles and destroying 3,640 homes.

Smoke hovered over the Los Angeles Basin for days, and airborne particulates reached 10 to 20 times usual levels. In addition to pieces of soot that can irritate airways and lodge in lungs, smoke contains toxic gases.

"We confirmed very substantial effects of wildfire smoke exposure on eyes as well as upper and lower respiratory symptoms, in both asthmatics and non-asthmatics," the study says. The increase in respiratory problems was strongest among children without asthma, apparently because asthmatics took preventive action, such as staying indoors, wearing masks and using air conditioners.

Kunzli said non-asthmatics reported as many health problems on the smoky days as asthmatics do on smoke-free days.

Parents of one of every five non-asthmatic children reported that the children were coughing during the fires, compared with one of every two to three asthmatic children. About 7% reported wheezing by non-asthmatic children, while for asthmatic children, it was one-third. About 13% of all the children missed school.

The health problems for non-asthmatic children were somewhat unexpected, said Jean Ospital of the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which co-funded the study.

"We generally think people with chronic diseases are more sensitive, but this shows that we're all sensitive to the effects of smoke and we have to worry about everyone, not just people with asthma," he said. "This study reinforces what we think is the right thing to do, to advise people to avoid exposure to smoke whenever they can."

Sneezing or stuffy noses were the most frequent symptom, reported by 41% of the parents, followed by irritated eyes, reported by more than 35%.

Although it's not unusual for children to suffer frequent stuffy noses and coughs, the rates of such symptoms rose substantially in the smokiest areas.

Parents of children in the communities with the highest particulate levels reported three times more eye irritation and twice as much coughing, nose symptoms and sore throats than those in less smoky areas. Also, those who smelled smoke indoors for more than six days reported wheezing and other respiratory problems two to five times more frequently than those with low smoke exposure. Asthma attacks increased 63% in the smoky areas.

Dr. Sverre Vedal of the University of Washington said in an editorial accompanying the report that it may seem obvious that people suffer respiratory problems during wildfires. He said, however, that the study was important to determine who is most susceptible and the full range of their symptoms.

But Vedal said there are likely biases in the data, because the researchers relied on parents' memories and focused on specific symptoms. "Although we know there are health impacts from exposure to wildfire smoke, we remain uncertain about the range and severity," he wrote.

## **EPA Drops Plans to Ease Pollution Rules**

By JOHN HEILPRIN, Associated Press Writer

Published on SF Gate, Thursday, Nov. 30, 2006, and Sacramento Bee, Friday, Dec. 1, 2006

The Bush administration, looking at the prospect of stronger oversight from a Democratic-led Congress, is withdrawing a proposal to let big polluters report less often on what they spew from their smokestacks.

The administration, however, is going ahead with a plan to make one-third less provide detailed figures at all.

The government last year proposed easing air regulations to exempt some companies from having to tell the Environmental Protection Agency about what it considers to be small releases of toxic pollutants.

That proposal is still alive. But abandoned now is the idea of making companies that must make such reports, known as toxic release inventory, do so every other year instead of annually.

"You will be pleased to know that I have decided against moving forward with changes to TRI reporting frequency," EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson wrote Democratic Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez of New Jersey this week.

Johnson decided the program would not be effective unless the reporting was done each year, agency spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said Thursday.

The EPA does plan to change the inventory requirements, easing what it called the "regulatory burden" on companies through use of a short form for reporting toxic pollution.

Currently, some 23,000 facilities are required to submit reports annually if they release more than 500 pounds of the worst toxic pollutants. Those include mercury, DDT, PCBs and other chemicals that persist in the environment and work up the food chain.

Johnson made clear in his letter Tuesday to Lautenberg and Menendez that the administration plans in 2007 to raise that threshold reporting requirement to 5,000 pounds. Companies would be exempt from the reporting requirements if they store the pollutants on site and claim to release "zero" amounts into the environment.

According to EPA officials, the higher threshold would free one-third of the 23,000 facilities from the reporting requirements. They include mining, utility, oil, rubber, plastics, printing, textile, leather tanning and semiconductor operations.

[Tracy Press, Editorial, Friday, Dec. 1, 2006:](#)

### **EPA defies logic on greenhouse gases**

Let's hope the Supreme Court takes a broader view of the world's climate problem than the president and his EPA.

With nearly all the notable scientists in agreement that greenhouse gases are warming the world, it's very difficult to discern the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's logic of its argument before the Supreme Court. The EPA asserts that since there is still some scientific uncertainty to the cause of this so-called climate change, it shouldn't regulate the emissions of greenhouse gases, even if it could.

Government lawyers told the justices Wednesday that the EPA doesn't have the authority to regulate such emissions because when Congress passed the 1970 Clean Air Act it didn't define carbon dioxide as an "air pollutant." The Clean Air Act is supposed to clean the air of pollutants, not the greenhouse gases that also come from motor vehicle tailpipes, declared Deputy Solicitor General Gregory Garre.

The EPA doesn't have the power to limit the emission of these harmful gases, and neither do the 12 states (including California) that sued the EPA for not doing its job, Garre said. That's because the states cannot show that they have been harmed by EPA's inaction.

Ever since he became president six years ago, George W. Bush has denied that there have been manmade climate changes.

The president hasn't been listening to the urgent words of scientists, and neither has his EPA, which maintains it's only supposed to assist in fixing problems involving local air quality like smog and acid rain. Planet Earth's warming it's too global of a problem, the EPA says.

Let's hope the Supreme Court takes a broader view of the climate problem than the president and his EPA. If the justices don't, it will be up to Congress to amend the Clean Air Act to include specific language to deal with greenhouse gases. Such legislation should not be punitive, but cooperative by allowing industry a "cap-and-trade" policy that's similar to the one used to improve air quality in the San Joaquin Valley.

If this legislation doesn't come to pass, American voters will have the opportunity in 2008 to replace the occupant in the White House with someone who has a more modern view of our world's ecological balance and how mankind has endangered its own existence. In no way should this be regarded as an endorsement of Al Gore for president. Even if we would endorse Gore - and we're not saying we would - this is why we would do it.

[Sacramento Bee, Editorial, Friday, Dec. 1, 2006:](#)

### **Editorial: Davis vs. Dixon**

#### **Cities feud over cars, racing and money**

The city of Davis has decided to sue its neighbor a few miles to the west, the city of Dixon, because Dixon proposes to build a horse racing track.

Thousands of gamblers mean thousands more cars on busy Interstate 80. Davis thinks Dixon has neither studied adequately the impact of all these cars on the freeway nor come up with a solution -- particularly for any impact on Davis. So Davis has filed a lawsuit. A court will have to review the lengthy environmental review of the racetrack, Dixon Downs, and decide whether its traffic analysis complies with the California Environmental Quality Act.

That will be a legal decision. But then there is the court of public opinion, and whether one city is being a worse neighbor than the other. It might turn out to be a conversation that Davis regrets launching.

The city of Davis is worried about some episodic traffic from waves of horse racing fans driving to and from Dixon Downs. A couple of events a year may draw 50,000 fans. Perhaps 25 events a year will draw about as many fans as attend a Kings game at Arco Arena, where more than 40 home games are played each year. Interstate 80 is the key transportation artery between the Sacramento region and the Bay Area. Based on the analysis by Dixon Downs, traffic right after big events will slow the freeway considerably.

Davis is worried that motorists on the I-80 will head through its city in search of short cuts. Davis City Councilman Don Saylor feels as if his city reached out to Dixon in search of a solution. "We want to talk about it," he said. "They don't."

Another breed of motorist on I-80, however, is an environmental concern. It's the motorist who lives in Dixon or Vacaville or Woodland who must drive to the university job in Davis. It's the motorist who creates traffic and air pollution because he or she can't afford to live in Davis because the city lacks the housing supply to meet the demand. Other cities are building the necessary homes (neighborhoods are generally money-losers for municipal governments, not profit centers). We don't recall Woodland or Dixon or West Sacramento ever suing Davis for its land-use decisions that end up creating traffic and air quality impacts on the region.

Dixon Downs certainly deserves a robust debate. It is bound to get one, since city residents have gathered the necessary signatures to bring the Dixon City Council's racetrack approval to a public up-or-down vote. But if the city of Davis truly wants to start a conversation on how one neighbor has an obligation to deal with all the regional impacts of what it does and doesn't do, life is about to get unsettling in the town with the toad tunnel.

The EPA's latest inventory said chemical pollution released into the environment fell to 4.24 billion pounds in 2004, a 4 percent drop from the previous year, because of declines among metal mining, electric utility and hazardous waste industries.

Environmentalists were alarmed that toxic releases in U.S. waterways rose 10 percent, to 241 million pounds of chemicals.

Lautenberg and Menendez said they were pleased the EPA had responded to their criticism of the proposed changes. But they said plans to move ahead with a higher reporting threshold still "would essentially gut it."