

Wood fires in Bay Area homes could become illegal under new regs

in the Modesto Bee, Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2007

SAN FRANCISCO — Nights by the family hearth could become a lot colder in the San Francisco Bay area under new rules being considered by smog regulators.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District plans to begin gauging public opinion on rules that would ban wood fires in residential fireplaces on bad air quality nights.

Regulators cite evidence that smoke from wood-burning can cause as much harm as cigarette smoke.

Sacramento County, the San Joaquin Valley and some Bay Area cities have already imposed similar bans, which include stiff fines for violators.

Officials say the rules would likely result in a ban on fireplace use about 20 nights a year.

Spare the Air: Avoid lighting fireplaces tonight

Bay City News Service

in the Tri-Valley Herald, Late Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District has announced a Spare the Air advisory for tonight due to unhealthy air quality forecasts.

Bay Area residents are being asked to avoid burning wood in fireplaces and woodstoves, which are large contributors to nighttime pollution levels, according to air quality spokeswoman Karen Schkolnick.

Small particle pollution from unnecessary wood burning contributes between 30 and 40 percent of wintertime air pollution, Schkolnick said, because the tiny particles released by burning wood burning can be inhaled into the lungs.

"It's one of the largest sources (of air pollution) that individuals have the most control over," she said.

The advisory is in reaction to unhealthy air forecasts for the San Jose and Santa Clara Valley areas, Schkolnick said, but because air is a shared resource, all Bay Area residents are being asked to voluntarily participate.

In addition to avoiding wood burning, residents are being asked to drive less, according to officials. Residents should postpone errands and use public transit when possible, Schkolnick said.

The Spare the Air advisory will be in effect until Wednesday night.

Residents asked to avoid lighting fireplaces to Spare the Air tonight

By Denis Cuff, Staff Writer

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Bay Area residents are asked not to burn wood fires in fireplaces and stoves tonight in the first Spare the Air Tonight advisory of the cold season.

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District issued the no-burn notice because concentrations of fine soot are predicted to reach unhealthy levels.

The advisory was issued at 11 a.m. today will remain in effect until 11 a.m. Wednesday.

The public also is asked to minimize driving, which also contributes to fine particle pollution, which can cause lung and respiratory problems.

Bakersfield's Kern Oil & Refining sold for \$286 million

The Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

BAKERSFIELD, Calif.—Kern Oil & Refining Co., which can process 27,000 barrels of crude oil daily, is being sold for \$286.5 million to NTR Acquisition Co.

If approved by regulators, the sale could close early next year.

The cash acquisition, which includes an investment from Occidental Petroleum Corp., is the first for Danbury, Conn.-based NTR, a public company that was formed to purchase refineries and other energy assets.

Kern Oil, built in 1934, has 110 employees and is one of 14 refineries in California that can make the state's special blends of gasoline and diesel to meet air pollution standards in the state.

The Bakersfield plant can process 370,000 gallons of gasoline and about 357,000 gallons of diesel each day, as well as fuel oil, gas oil and solvents for the paint and coatings industries.

NTR has a three-year, \$540 million plan to increase output of gasoline or diesel by 50 percent to 70 percent.

Kern Oil's 113 employees were expected to stay on after the acquisition.

Federal Dairy: Clearing the Roadblocks to Telecommuting

By Stephen Barr

Washington Post Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2007

Concerned that too few federal employees are getting plugged into telecommuting, House Democrats are drafting legislation that would encourage agencies to allow eligible employees to telework four days a month, on average.

Reps. Danny K. Davis (D-Ill.) of the House federal workforce subcommittee, and John Sarbanes (D-Md.) are the chief sponsors of the proposal, which would require every federal agency to establish a telework policy so more employees could choose to work from home or at locations away from their primary office.

The most recent federal data, collected in 2005, showed that about 6.6 percent of federal workers can be considered regular telecommuters. Raising that percentage, proponents say, would cut back Washington's traffic problems, reduce auto emissions and allow agencies to keep working even when emergencies force main offices to shut down.

Although Congress has urged agencies to promote telework for the past five years, a May survey of 25 federal agencies, conducted by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, found them to have no consistent definition of telework.

Some agencies decide who may telecommute on a case-by-case basis; other agencies exclude certain occupations from eligibility. The majority of agencies do not notify employees of their eligibility to telecommute unless the employee makes a request, the survey found.

"One only has to read Dr. Gridlock's column in The Washington Post to know that federal employees already know the answer to the congestion, pollution, and emergency preparedness problems we face. The answer is telecommuting," Davis said yesterday in a statement.

"Just last Thursday a reader of Dr. Gridlock's column wrote, 'I still believe more federal employees should telework at least once a week' I and many of my colleagues agree with Dr. Gridlock's readers.

That is why I, along with Rep. Sarbanes, will introduce legislation to spur all federal agencies to implement telework policies that permit their employees to telework," Davis said.

Davis's subcommittee has scheduled a hearing on telework for this morning. Witnesses invited to testify include Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.), a longtime advocate of telecommuting, and officials from the Office of Personnel Management General Services Administration and the Government Accountability Office, a subcommittee aide said.

Sarbanes said expanding telework in the government will help improve the quality of life of employees and make the government more competitive when hiring. In addition, he said in a statement, telecommuting provides "important environmental benefits" by reducing traffic congestion and pollution.

During the summer, Sarbanes offered an amendment to the House energy package, which was approved, that called on federal agencies to permit telecommuting to the maximum extent possible. The energy legislation is pending in the Senate.

"I am pleased we are working collaboratively to move this effort forward," he said of the proposed bill.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Calif.), chairman of the House oversight committee, called the bill "an important step forward" and said he will become a co-sponsor.

The Davis-Sarbanes proposal would permit agencies to exempt employees who handle classified or other security-sensitive materials on a daily basis or must be physically present in the office because they operate special equipment, according to a draft version. The proposed bill also would require agencies to provide training on telework to managers and employees.

Proponents of telecommuting say agencies can offer a work-at-home perk without reducing productivity and usually point to the Patent and Trademark Office as a case study.

But numerous federal managers are skeptical of telecommuting's benefits, administration officials have said. Many think they could lose control of their staff or would have fewer face-to-face meetings with employees, make it more challenging to communicate with them, according to survey released in January by the Telework Exchange and the Federal Managers Association.

QUEEN OF THE ROAD

Calling in polluters is still an option

Contra Costa Times, Wednesday, Nov. 7, 2007

Commuter: I travel the freeways a lot and almost every day see cars that pollute like crazy. There used to be signs along the highway with 800 numbers one could call to report those polluters, but I haven't seen any lately.

Can one still report people whose cars are spewing exhaust all over creation?

Chloe Floriental, cyberspace

Queen: Yes, one can!

"Smoking vehicles are detrimental to California's air quality," according to the state Air Resources Board.

The California Air Resources Board has a complaint form available on its Web site, www.arb.ca.gov, or you can call in a report to the agency at 800-END-SMOG. (363-7664)

You can also file a complaint online with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District at <http://www.baaqmd.gov> or call 800-EXHAUST (394-2878).

The Queen called both of these numbers and they are operational.

I could not, however, confirm the legitimacy of "#SMOG." This number is supposed to be available to cell phone users in California, but according to the Air Resources Board it's not available in all areas.

The Queen and her court tried dialing it in Antioch, Concord, Martinez and Walnut Creek with no luck. If there's anyone out there who got through, let us know.

Be sure to jot down the offending vehicle's make, model and license plate number as well as the time, date and location where you saw it.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., Nov. 7, 2007:](#)

No break from bad air in autumn

We must do all we can to minimize polluting ways.

The Valley's annual autumn bout with foul, stagnant air came a little earlier this year, and it's left thousands wheezing and coughing -- and sometimes driving them to the hospital for relief. We don't really need more evidence of the need for aggressive measures against air pollution in the Valley, but we keep getting it anyway.

The current problem is blamed on high pressure that sits above the Valley, trapping fine particles in the atmosphere. That debris, called particulate matter, gets lodged deep in human lungs and can trigger a host of medical problems, from asthma attacks to heart damage.

There may be relief tomorrow, if a storm moves through the Valley and winds pick up. Another storm is possible for the weekend.

But these high pressure systems are typical of fall weather in the Valley; we can expect the current conditions to be repeated.

That's bad news for Valley residents. We foul the air with our vehicles, our fireplaces, our farming and industrial activities, and then we have to breathe the consequences of our actions.

Already one child in five in the Valley suffers from asthma. Bad air costs us an additional \$3 billion-plus each year in health costs.

Most of us know someone who has had to leave the Valley for the sake of a child's health or their own.

For the short term, it's important that people restrict outdoor activities, particularly strenuous exercise, in the morning and evening, when the problem is at its peak. Forgo that cozy wood fire unless it's absolutely necessary. Drive less.

For the long term, we all need to support stronger measures at the local, state and federal levels to combat air pollution.

The state Air Resources Board is moving toward tougher regulations, and that's good news. California is about to sue the federal Environmental Protection Agency over its failure to grant a waiver to the state for tighter controls on vehicle emissions -- also good news.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger recently signed a bill that will expand the governing board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The new members will include a pair of scientific and medical experts, bringing expertise now lacking on a board dominated by county supervisors from around the Valley, with a pronounced tendency to be satisfied with an unsatisfactory status quo.

But in the end, it's up to all of us. We create the vast bulk of the pollution we breathe, and we are responsible for finding solutions.

Habits have to change, including our deeply ingrained love of the individual vehicle. New fuels for those vehicles, and new forms of energy of every kind must be introduced.

We have to get used to doing without such indulgences as gas-powered lawn equipment and charcoal lighter fluid for the barbecue grill. We even need to do a better job of making sure paint cans are securely sealed. All those things -- and dozens more -- contribute to the Valley's air quality problem.

In short, we are the problem. It will take an enormous effort to solve our air pollution problems, but we really don't have a choice. It's that, or stop breathing.

[Letter to the Modesto Bee, Monday, Nov. 5, 2007](#)

Election 2007: Murphy's campaign flier contains inaccuracies

A campaign flier paid for by the Friends of Donna Murphy regarding the Salida Sanitary District contains inaccurate statements. Before hitting the polls, I urge voters to consider the following:

Flier statement: The district has operated without valid permits since 1992.

Fact: The operating permit for land discharge was issued in 1992 and does not have a sunset date. It is valid until the California Regional Water Quality Control Board issues Salida Sanitary District another one.

Flier statement: Years of deferred maintenance are leading to higher costs and serious odor problems.

Fact: [The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's](#) in-house daily log notes only five complaints since 2000; the Salida Sanitary District has never received a notice of violation.

Flier statement: Sewer rates increased more than 100 percent last year.

Fact: The average rate paid in the Central Valley is \$39 per month. Salida's current monthly charge of \$26.40 was established in 2006. Since 2003, the rate had been \$13.20 per month. The rate prior to that was \$12 per month, set in 1991.

An election predicated on inaccurate information doesn't serve the voters and diminishes the credibility of the board. The Salida Sanitary District deserves better than Donna Murphy.

Heather Moore, Salida