

Air district: Think twice about fireplace use during holidays

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, Dec. 23, 2010

Valley air district officials may be willing to look a bit Scrooge-like as Christmas approaches -- if it results in more breathable air in the valley.

Officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District are urging residents to think twice about burning that traditional Yule log in their fireplace this holiday season. Consider first, they ask, the health and well-being of your neighbors.

"Share the good cheer of the holidays, not wood smoke," Seyed Sadredin, the air district's executive director, said in a statement Wednesday.

"The fires that seem so cozy and inviting," he added, "can actually cause your neighbors distress."

Sadredin is the first to acknowledge the comforts and traditions associated with having a warm fire crackling in the home hearth, especially during this festive time of year.

But on those nights when the atmosphere traps smoke close to the ground, the health and well-being of those who share our air should take priority, he said.

Residential wood burning can produce up to 24 tons per day of particulate matter, known as PMs, valleywide. PM is composed of soot, ash, tiny droplets of liquid and other material. Fine particulate matter -- PM2.5 -- has been linked to respiratory disease, heart attacks and even lung cancer, according to the air district.

The district's Check Before You Burn program, in effect from November through February, declares residential wood-burning prohibitions by county when air quality is deteriorating.

"Because of the willingness of valley residents to rise to the occasion, the past two winters have been the cleanest on record for the valley," Sadredin said.

With back-to-back rain storms pushing great masses of air in and out of the valley, wood burning has not been prohibited for several days.

But the "Burn Cleanly" designation is still a reminder to never burn trash, magazines, newspapers or plastics in your fireplace and to consider using a manufactured fire log as a cleaner alternative to wood.

But the best option is to burn nothing at all, officials say.

People without access to natural gas in their homes and those who use stoves as their sole source of heat are exempt from the air rules.

For most valley residents, failure to abide by the restrictions can result in a fine of \$50, which may be waived by attending a special class. Subsequent offenses can draw fines of \$150 or higher.

Wood-burning forecasts are issued each day and are in effect for 24 hours beginning at midnight. Localized information can be obtained by going to the weather forecast at Bakersfield.com or by checking the daily weather page in *The Californian*.

Holiday fireplace use discouraged

Stockton Record, Thursday, December 23, 2010

San Joaquin Valley air cops are urging the public not to use fireplaces over the holidays.

A spike in the amount of pollution spewing from chimneys from Stockton to Bakersfield is typically seen on Christmas and other days when families are gathered together at home, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said.

The pollution contains tiny particles that have been linked to respiratory disease, heart attacks and lung cancer.

While officials are merely asking for the public's cooperation, wood burning can be banned altogether under certain conditions. To find out whether a ban is in effect, call (800) 766-4463 after 4 p.m. today or visit valleyair.org and click on "Check Before You Burn."

[Merced Sun-Star Editorial, Thursday, December 23, 2010](#)

Our View: Rail funding is gift from Ohio and Wisconsin

As other states are standing still, California is moving full-speed ahead with high-speed system.

California's high-speed rail system is slowly coming together, thanks to a commitment to 21st-century progress and political games over federal funding by the Republican governors of Ohio and Wisconsin.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority initially approved a 65-mile segment of the train in the Valley. But then the board sent the Valley more good news by adding another segment after the governors of Ohio and Wisconsin refused their states' federal stimulus funding for high-speed rail. The Federal Railroad Administration took the money back and reallocated more than half of the \$1.2 billion to California.

Rail Authority Vice Chairman Tom Umberg was correct in calling the latest federal funding "an early Christmas present" to California from Ohio and Wisconsin. If those states want to throw other federal funding our way, we'll take it.

The high-speed rail funds could increase the length of track being built starting in 2012 to as much as 123 miles. That would create an initial phase running from just south of Madera to the edge of Bakersfield, according to rail officials.

The California project is envisioned as an 800-mile system that would link the state's major urban centers with trains moving at speeds of up to 220 mph. It would run through the Valley and give our region a major economic boost, as well as high-speed rail transportation to other parts of the state.

The project is expected to generate 80,000 temporary construction jobs. But Merced County still is in the running to be the site of the high-speed rail maintenance facility, which would provide 1,500 permanent jobs.

Economic development experts say the maintenance facility would be a "billion-dollar-a-year game-changer" for Merced County's economy.

High-speed rail is the most promising public-works project to come along in decades. It not only would create high-paying jobs, but would transport people around the state efficiently and help improve air quality.

California's high-speed rail leaders have been steadily moving forward as many other states act as if high-speed rail is an untried technology. Europe and Japan have been using it for years. As Californians, we are delighted to show the way in this country.