

[Fresno Bee Earth Log, Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2014:](#)

## **Drumbeat builds to ban wood burning in fireplaces**

By Mark Grossi

As particle pollution continues to hang at dangerous levels in the air, I hear a lot more from readers who want to completely ban wood-burning in fireplaces here.

Blame drought. Blame the mountains and inversion layers that trap bad air. But also blame folks who have been burning wood in spite of the many daily bans ordered by local air authorities.

The conditions and the wood burning are getting the public's attention. Many are questioning the wood-burning policies and rules.

Here's how the system works: When stagnant air holds winter pollution in the San Joaquin Valley, wood-burning is prohibited. Then when storms come through and clean out the bad air, people are allowed to burn wood again.

One woman called Friday and said what many others have told me. The approach makes no sense.

"We're not alone in the woods," she said. "The air gets cleaner when the wind blows. So why are we lighting up fires to dirty up the clean air again? You're only hurting your neighbors."

I've had lots of calls, letters and emails about this over the last two decades I've covered air quality. But this winter is different. I stopped counting after the first dozen calls six weeks ago.

I am not saying this is a wave of public sentiment. There are many who argue on the other side. Some say it's cheaper to burn wood than pay to run heaters. Some say the wood fire eases arthritis and helps get them through the cold weather.

Some say it's their tradition and their right to warm their home this way. Some just love the smell of a wood fire in the privacy of their own home.

They also point to many other sources of particle pollution, including diesel trucks, cars and power plants.

But air quality experts argue residential fuel combustion -- wood burning -- is right at the top of the list during winter, and it takes place right in your neighborhood.

Most of us know someone who carries an inhaler and suffers from asthma in this Valley.

I've written a lot about heart episodes, asthma attacks and the estimated 800 premature deaths caused by these microscopic specks, known as PM-2.5.

More than one caller has wondered how much worse this could get in the coming decades as climate changes.

I don't know how the future will look, but science has looked at the evidence in the past. Droughts have lasted for decades in previous centuries. This issue is not going away.