

Wood burning in fireplace is No. 1 air problem in cool weather

by Mark Grossi

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My column last week started a spirited conversation on Facebook about completely banning wood-burning in fireplaces.

It also started some confusion about how high wood-burning ranks among sources of pollution.

At the time, I was writing about the dozens of phone calls and emails I've received this winter from people who would like to see the wood-burning bans become permanent in the Valley.

On Facebook, the question emerged: Is wood burning in fireplaces really a big deal? Answer: Yes. It is the single biggest particle pollution source in the cold weather.

According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, wood burning is 30% of what's out there during the cooler months, and it's right in your neighborhood.

People talk about other sources ranking higher -- namely, remaining ag waste burning and diesel trucks.

That is actually true, but only if you look at the numbers spread out over the entire year. Wood burning in fireplaces ranks No. 3 in that scenario, but it's a pointless comparison since the majority of such burning takes place between November and February.

The Valley air district has looked at the source during those months -- when most exceedances of the federal fine particle pollution actually occur. Wood burning is No. 1.