

Merced County residents with asthma should know this about burning wood, experts say

By Monica Velez
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The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District advises Merced County residents not to burn wood through the end of Tuesday as a health precaution, officials said in a statement.

Because air quality is poor, officials are prohibiting people to burn wood or pellets in fire pits, residential stoves and other devices not registered with the Valley Air District.

The district's winter program, Check Before You Burn, lasts through February, and is designed to reduce the amount of unhealthy emissions in Central Valley air by restricting the use of wood-burning devices.

"Wood smoke is one of the most dangerous pollutants that you can expose yourself, your children and your neighbors to," said Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the Valley Air District. "Prolonged exposure to wood smoke can lead to pulmonary arterial hypertension, pulmonary heart disease, heart failure and cancer."

People can look at daily wood-burning statuses at www.valleyair.org/CBYB or by calling 1-800-SMOG INFO (766-4463).

The district also advises people to register their wood-burning devices at www.valleyair.org/CBYBregistration.

Particulate matter, the main emission seen during winter, can affect people with respiratory diseases, like asthma, and cause lung infections and bronchitis.

"Residential wood burning is the single largest source of harmful particulate matter during winter and can pump 17 tons of particulate matter into Valley skies daily," according to the statement.

Fireplaces and stoves that run solely on propane or gas are exempt.