

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

News Release

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Tumbleweed burn permits get easier Streamlined process benefits fire hazard-reduction efforts

Residents of the valley portion of Kern County soon will be able to contact just one government agency to obtain permits to burn tumbleweeds. Beginning July 15, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will handle all burn permits for the valley portion of the county.

Currently, a resident who wants to burn tumbleweeds to reduce a fire hazard must first obtain one permit from the Air District and a separate permit from the City of Bakersfield Fire Department or the Kern County Fire Department. The Air District uses permits and a call-in procedure to protect air quality -- residents must call in prior to burning to ensure it's a "burn day" and to report the amount of waste they'll ignite. Burning is allowed only on designated days, when weather conditions prevent smoke from building up in the Valley and further degrading air quality. The city and county fire departments issue burn permits to eliminate fire hazards created by the accumulation of tumbleweeds.

The two-permit requirement created confusion and frustration because residents occasionally failed to obtain one of the permits prior to burning. Therefore, Air District and fire department staff members streamlined the process. The Air District will issue burn permits, pre-inspect residential burn piles to ensure compliance with air quality and fire safety procedures, and notify the fire departments of scheduled burns. Thirty-day permits issued by the fire departments prior to July 15 will be considered valid until their expiration dates.

"The idea here is to make things easier for the public, without compromising air quality," said Creighton Smith, compliance supervisor for the Air District's southern region office in Bakersfield. "The fire departments recognized the problem and really stepped up to the plate to work out a solution."

Fire officials added that the change benefits residents and the agencies alike.

"Not only does this new process reduce work for the resident, but the fire departments and Air District no longer will be duplicating efforts," said Bakersfield Fire Chief Ron Frazee.

Consolidation of the burn permits also will help the Air District implement a new smoke management program. The program, which is designed to further protect air quality, is scheduled to take effect in the fall.

Residents in the Valley portion of Kern who need to burn tumbleweeds to reduce fire hazards can apply for burn permits by calling (661) 326-6949 between 7 and 11 a.m. every day, including weekends and holidays. Permits are issued on an annual basis and cost between \$22 and \$62. Residents in the foothills and mountain regions of Kern County still should apply for burn permits from the county fire department.

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