

Burn rules have at least one resident fuming

By Michael Cipponeri - Turlock Journal

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Less than one week after the new residential wood-burning regulations went into effect, one Turlock resident is advertising his displeasure at the rules.

Using a makeshift sign decorated by yellow balloons in front of his East Hawkeye Avenue home, Frank Baba, 82, has something to say about the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's regulations - and wonders what's coming next.

"It was mostly a joke," Baba said with a smile Friday afternoon. "I just wanted to razz them a little."

Though Baba's sign was meant to be humorous, he said he has a feeling that the new burn regulations could be the beginning of a long and slippery slope.

"Where do most people have their fireplaces?" he asked. "They have them in their living rooms. What's the next stop? Your bedroom is just a few feet away and soon they will be telling you what to do in there, too."

The newly-mandated wood-burning program is designed to reduce air pollution created by fireplaces and wood heaters in all eight counties patrolled by the Valley Air District.

Through Feb. 28, solid fuels in fireplaces and heaters will be prohibited when the air quality is expected to be unhealthy.

Residents are asked to "Check Before You Burn" in order to avoid fines and improve air quality. Solid fuels include wood, pellets and manufactured logs. The restrictions do not apply to natural gas or propane devices, or in homes where wood-burning is the only source of heat.

Last Saturday, the Air District also began transitioning to a Smoke Management Program for farmers with agricultural burn permits. Instead of receiving the ag-burn status through public announcements, farms can obtain the ag-burn determination for their specific crops and locations by calling the phone number on their permits.

To find the daily wood-burning status, call 1-8--SMOG-INFO (766-4463) or visit www.valleyair.org <<http://www.valleyair.org>>. A daily reminder of the burn status also will appear on the bottom of the Journal's front page to alert residents as to any restrictions.

To report violations during "no burn" days, which are expected to number between four and 25 days this season, call 1-800-281-7003.

Air District inspectors will perform surveillance and investigate complaints, and violations can result in fines.

[Tri-Valley Herald editorial, Dec. 2, 2003:](#)

Hybrid autos warrant car pool privileges

BEFORE leaving office, former-Gov. Gray Davis asked federal Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta for permission to allow solo drivers of hybrid cars to use California's 1,100 miles of car pool lanes. The idea sounds good in principle and we hope it succeeds, but it might not work out as well as boosters would have us believe.

Under Davis' plan -- one of three proposals on the environment recently championed by the former governor -- vehicles that pass California's emission standards and get better than 45 miles a gallon would be allowed to use car pool lanes during rush hour. If approved by lawmakers in Sacramento and Washington, state officials say motorists would be able to avail themselves of the new rule by 2005.

If and when the new plan is put into effect, it will be interesting to see how it is enforced. After all, hybrid cars don't exactly stand out like a Hummer, making cheating a real possibility. And while there are only three hybrid cars on the market right now -- Toyota Prius, Honda Civic and Honda Insight -- more models are bound to come off the assembly line, making identification more difficult.

Assuming identification issues are worked out, it will take several years before hybrid cars with or without solo drivers are found throughout the Bay Area's highway network. Without a boost in the number of hybrid vehicles, it's hard to see how the car pool plan would have a significant impact on congestion and smog reduction.

For one thing, there are only 20,000 private hybrid cars in the entire state. But, according to state Treasurer Phil Angelides, that figure should grow to 100,000 to 300,000 by the end of the decade.

In addition, the region's 275 miles of car pool lanes -- or high occupancy vehicle lanes -- are presently concentrated in the South Bay, although more of the Bay Area should be crisscrossed with car pool lanes through Caltrans' plan to double the state's network over the next 20 years.

Still, the longer-term benefits of getting people out of fuel-inefficient, pollution-prodigious cars into hybrid vehicles and onto car pool lanes are compelling enough to feel as upbeat about the plan as environmentalists and several state officials have been.

Arizona and Virginia are the only states other than California to have sought federal approval to allow hybrid vehicles into car pool lanes, with none of the three having put their proposals into effect. With California still the nation's trendsetter -- particularly on air quality and traffic issues -- we would welcome a first plan of its kind right here in the Golden State.

Letters to the Bakersfield Californian, Dec. 2, 2003:

Make right car choice

California car buyers have a couple of choices to make other than the make, model, color and optional equipment.

Stop buying the big, high powered, gas guzzling SUVs and/or pick-up trucks and send a message to the automobile industry to design and manufacture the same with available technology Hybrid Engine Systems that provide low to ultra low emissions and get 45 to 55 miles per gallon of gas.

Go ahead and buy that big gas hog, pollution spewing vehicle and stop complaining and/or ignoring the foul, dirty, poisonous air (the worst in the nation as reported in *The Californian* and stated by the San Joaquin Valley Air Quality Administration) and prepare to develop respiratory diseases and die in agony along with thousands of other people who will suffer because of your unnecessary "need for speed."

With the best choice, you will have to postpone buying that weapon of mass destruction until the automobile industry gets the message. It will amaze you how fast they will respond to "no." The good news is you will save a ton of money on gas and medical care and will postpone your early demise.

Go ahead and choose. It is only your life and your neighbors.

-- WALTER J. MUNDY, Tehachapi

They're at it again

Now that we have the wildfires out, I got to wondering about who was on the fire line? Some 700,000 plus acres is one thousand one hundred square miles. Enough wood was burned to run every fireplace in Southern California for years.

We have different environmental groups fighting to stop people from burning their fireplaces. Just how many of them were helping to put out the fires?

They could have been cooks, washing clothes or any of the behind-the-line jobs. Or were they all at home in their big easy chairs thinking of more ways to put road blocks in the way of progress, such as turning neighbor against neighbor?

-- HAROLD JOHNSTON, Bakersfield