

Fireplace rule in effect? Look for these symbols

Modesto Bee, November 5, 2003

Fireplace-burning restrictions took effect Saturday, and since then the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has not declared either a "discouraged" burning day or a "prohibited" burning day. When either declaration is made, The Bee will announce it by using these symbols on the front page. The symbols, when required, will accompany weather data on Page A-1. From Monday through Saturday, weather information is almost always in the top right-hand corner of the front page. On Sundays, weather data usually are printed near the lower left-hand corner of the page.

Under a "discouraged" declaration, people are asked to voluntarily curb wood-burning in fireplaces. "Prohibited" brings a mandatory ban. Daily fireplace burning reports also are available by telephone from the air district, 800-766-4463, and online, www.valleyair.org. Declarations, based on air quality forecasts, will be made on a county-by-county basis. The new rule exempts people whose sole source of heat is wood, people who live above 3,000 feet or people who do not have access to natural gas. For more information, call the air pollution control district, 577-6400.

Farmers share concern on air rule

By Mark Grossi

The Fresno Bee

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With agriculture's historic exemption for air operating permits disappearing Jan. 1, farm officials Tuesday said they worry about associated rules wiping out vital funding for replacement of dirty diesel engines.

Farmers told state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, that millions in government funds for replacing old water pump engines are based on voluntary applications. With new rules requiring replacements, the effort technically would no longer be voluntary.

"We don't want to see this go beyond what was agreed upon," said Roger Isom, vice president and director of technical services for California Cotton Ginners and Growers Associations.

Florez was in Fresno Tuesday to hear how and when officials planned to implement his Senate Bill 700, which repealed the farm exemption and set up a framework for historic farm air regulation.

Florez, who has held 10 other field hearings on air quality this year, convened his first air hearing since Gov. Davis signed five air quality laws in September. The cornerstone of the five laws is SB 700, which averted federal sanctions for California.

The law becomes effective Jan. 1, and large farming operations must file applications with the state for air operating permits by July 1.

But farm officials said Florez and others must guard against unintended consequences, such as losing voluntary "incentive" money. The money for the voluntary engine replacement has come mostly from the state-funded Carl Moyer program. About 2,600 of the 4,500 dirty diesel farm engines have been replaced, removing tons of pollution annually.

No one at the Florez hearing confirmed the farmers' fears. Since rules to implement SB 700 have not yet been written, San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District officials said it's difficult to answer specific questions now.

District officials said rules for the controls required in the Florez law would take years to implement. Workshops would begin next year and rules would be adopted in mid-2005. They would take effect in January 2006.

Farmers will choose from a menu of controls, such as watering down unpaved roads to hold down dust. The district has been working with farm officials on pollution-reduction choices.

"We have been able to bring in a diversity of strategies that we believe will work," said Mark Boese, deputy air pollution control officer.

More than half of the Valley's particulate matter -- small bits of dust, chemicals and other specks -- is attributed to agriculture. About 20% of the pollutants that make smog come from farms.

Environmentalists said the Valley, and the rest of the state, has waited long enough for regulation to take a bite out of that pollution. Sierra Club member Kevin Hall said he expected a political fight and more delay over the rules.

"It's the ag game plan," Hall said. "When it comes down to the final stage of a rule, you'll see a huge lobbying effort to change it."

Hall said government officials and scientists know enough about farm pollution to regulate it. But one researcher, Charles Krauter of California State University, Fresno, said that is not true in the case of dairy emissions.

Krauter is studying three Valley dairies this winter and next spring to update research dating back to the 1930s. He expects to have some result by next summer.

"We are not far along at all," Krauter said. "I wish we were."

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[Merced Sun-Star opinion, Nov. 3, 2003:](#)

Of smog pollution and garage clutter

Monday musings...

Longtime Merced County residents will have a hard time remembering when our skies looked as dirty as they do now. One expects to see smog-shrouded buildings in San Francisco or Los Angeles, but not necessarily Merced. Think again. Now our skyline has a ghastly, unhealthy look to it.

Bit by bit the dingy brown smog has snuck up and blanketed us until the San Joaquin Valley is known nationwide for its hazardous breathing conditions. That's not a distinction one would want to be heralded in tourist brochures or travel magazines. The Valley is a big trough of land, bounded by mountain ranges on either side that keep all the smoggy stuff bottled up. Actually, it's kind of a funnel in which Bay Area smog is whisked in a southeasterly direction through Altamont Pass and then south along Highway 99 all the way to Bakersfield and beyond.

Seen from the air, there's a distinct ribbon of smog that follows the Highway 99 corridor, fueled, if you'll pardon the expression, by untold numbers of cars, buses, trucks, railroad trains and airplanes. By the way, Highway 99 has seemed to be extra-busy at times during the day lately between Merced and Fresno, doing its part to keep the smog numbers way up there.

Perhaps in another month or two we'll have some wind or rain which will blow or wash away the filthy smog for at least a little while and one morning when the cloud cover dissipates we'll notice the Sierra foothills once again.

Along with the smog, it seems like this area is shrouded in extra coatings of dust now. Many cars seem to have an abnormally thick layer of powdery dirt on them and it only takes a week or so for that freshly-washed vehicle to look like it has been running around a dusty farm trail.

While it's been smoggy and dry lately, at least the temperatures have been pleasant to moderate for most of the day and this balmy period thankfully should last a few weeks more. It's a good time to water the lawn, sit on the porch, take the dog for a walk, ride a bike, or go to the park.

Know what's one of the most enviable sights in Merced? Drive by some neighborhoods where residents have left their garage doors open and notice wide-open spaces, mostly bare walls and

floors, with the few items stored inside neatly arranged. Why, in many cases, there's even room for a car or two - imagine that!

Other garages, sadly, become the repository for stuff that's too good to throw out but not worthy of being displayed inside the house. Periodically an "urban renewal" project is needed to reclaim this precious garage space for something more useful and attractive looking. Finding room for all our possessions sometimes can be a challenging task.