

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, March 5, 2010:](#)
Pay attention when it's a no-burn day

The report card on valley air quality is one of those good news-bad news mixes.

The good news: The valley experienced fewer days with unhealthy air this winter, and even on the unhealthy days, the counts of fine particulate matter were generally lower than they have been.

The bad news: Too many Stanislaus County residents either didn't get the message about limiting use of their fireplaces this winter or disregarded the no-burn alerts, which were issued on 25 days between Nov. 1 and Feb. 28.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District issued 69 notices of violation in Stanislaus during those four months, the second highest number of violations among the eight valley counties.

Fresno County, which has a population nearly twice that of Stanislaus, was by far the leader in violations, with 158.

Overall officials believe that fireplace use is down considerably, which is why air quality has improved. In November 2008, the air district imposed stricter requirements for fireplace use and began imposing more no-burn days. It also went to a simple yes-or-no designation. Previously, there were three designations: burn cleanly, burning discouraged, burning prohibited. People who rely solely on their fireplaces or wood stoves for heat are exempted.

Air officials say that the violation tally is not the defining aspect of the issue. They believe the improving air quality is more important.

The fireplace/ stove burning restrictions ended Feb. 28, so residents can burn as they want this month. But there are other ways to help air quality — on a year-round basis. The air district provides a number of suggestions on the Web at www.healthyairliving.com.

Meanwhile, a new study underscores the importance of reducing pollution. The highly regarded Rand Corp. found that pollution-related illnesses contributed to \$193 million in hospital spending in California between 2005 and 2007.

Researchers found that three-quarters of the health problems analyzed were the result of high levels of fine particulate pollution, in which small quantities of soot get trapped in the lungs. One-quarter of the analyzed conditions were triggered by breathing ozone.

Pollution led to more than 29,000 emergency room visits and hospital admissions over the three years, the study found. Nearly half of those were for asthma in children, but the more expensive admissions involved bronchitis, pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. (To read the summary, go to www.rand.org.)

Air pollution in our valley remains a serious problem. We're making some progress, but we cannot get complacent.