

Valley air district grants available for replacing fireplaces, wood stoves

Staff Writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Nov. 14, 2012

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is offering financial incentives to upgrade fireplaces and pellet stoves with versions that produce less pollution from burning wood or versions that operate on natural gas.

The financial assistance is available for homes within the eight counties the district covers, including Tulare County.

The grants are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and air district officials estimate they will have enough money to provide the financial assistance through the winter.

Last fall and winter, the district distributed more than \$600,000 to 980 applicants for assistance, and this fall and winter \$2 million is available.

For an application and more information, go online to www.valleyair.org, click "Grants and Incentives" and then on the "Burn Cleaner Program."

Information also is available by calling 230-5858.

Merced burn spreads smoke

Modesto Bee and Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, Nov. 15, 2012

Late Thursday afternoon, the thick smell of smoke drifted into Stanislaus County from a controlled burn at least 30 miles to the south.

It was a no-burn day here, but not in Merced County.

A 400-acre controlled burn at the San Luis National Wildlife Refuge near Los Banos ended about noon, but residents as far north as northeast Modesto (more than 60 miles away) started smelling the residual smoke about 4 p.m.

Today, Merced and Stanislaus County residents will be allowed to burn cleanly.

Burning cleanly, as advised by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, includes:

Using an EPA Phase II-certified wood-burning device and burning dry, seasoned wood.

Never burn trash, magazines, newspapers, plastics or other materials not designed to burn in fireplaces or stoves. This is illegal and hazardous.

For a fire in an open fireplace, a manufactured fire log may be a cleaner alternative to wood.

Residential wood burning is the single largest source of harmful particulate matter during winter, pumping up to 17 tons into the valley sky each day, the district said in a news release. The pollution is known to exacerbate respiratory illness.

"Check Before You Burn" runs through February. The district makes exceptions to the wood-burning prohibitions for homes that do not have access to natural gas service or any other source of heat.

Daily wood-burning forecasts are available at 4:30 p.m. at <http://valleyair.org/aqinfo/WoodBurnPage.htm>, by calling (800) 766-4463 or by subscribing to the daily air quality forecast at www.valleyair.org/lists/list.htm.

[Modesto Bee editorial, Friday, November 16, 2012:](#)

Help clear the air; check before burning

According to the calendar, fall begins in late September, but we all know that November tends to mark the true start of fall in the San Joaquin Valley.

It's also the start of a four-month "check before you burn" season in the valley, when the valley air district restricts use of wood-burning fireplaces and stoves because air quality is poor due to high counts of small particulates. In the first 15 days of this month, Stanislaus County has had three such days. Merced County had none, and San Joaquin County had only one.

The fireplace restrictions have been around for many years, but every year, some residents gripe about them. Others suggest that there should be more days in which burning is prohibited because they are bothered by the smoke that drifts through their neighborhoods. The particulates can be irritating for some people and even lethal for those with asthma or breathing illnesses.

People who don't have access to natural gas service and rely entirely on their wood-burning stoves for heat qualify for an exemption. There aren't a lot of those people in the valley, especially in the urban areas. And in newer homes, most of the fireplaces are gas, so they are not subject to burn prohibitions.

Are the current restrictions so tough as to be onerous?

We don't think so, when the trade-off is improving air quality. Also, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District makes it easy for people to check on whether it is a "please burn cleanly" or a "wood burning prohibited" day. The information is available on the district Web site, www.valleyair.org, and people can sign up for an e-mail alert. It is also available on a toll-free phone line, (800) 766-4463. The Bee prints the information on its daily weather page on the back of the Local News section. Look at the top right corner for the burn advisories for Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin counties.

The air district is looking at tighter rules for the future and those could severely limit wood burning during the winter. The tighter restrictions are one of several proposals from the valley air district to meet the federal air standards; a vote could be taken next month, though the tighter restrictions wouldn't take effect until 2014. Information about the proposals is available at www.valleyair.org/Air_Quality_Plans/PM25Plans2012.htm.

For the time being, we urge residents to abide by the burn restrictions and to burn cleanly when they do have a fire in the fireplace. That means using clean, seasoned and dry wood, or opting for a manufactured fire log, which provides the same ambience but burns more cleanly.

And we urge people to consider the incentives that the air district is offering to people who upgrade to a fireplace insert or cleaner-burning pellet or gas stoves. The cash incentives range from \$100 to \$1,500. Information is available on the Web site.

It's tempting to reminisce about the days when there were no restrictions on fireplace use. Those also were the days when there were far fewer people living in our valley and when we weren't as aware of the health impacts of bad air. The particulates from burning in an open fireplace contribute to a valleywide problem, but their impact is greatest on the people who live in that house or nearby. That should be enough to encourage valley residents to check before you burn.

[Merced Sun-Star commentary, Sat., Nov. 17, 2012:](#)

What cost to clear the air?

Carbon market will help economy and environment

By Anthony L. Westerling

As hundreds of thousands of families are still struggling in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy -- which roared ashore nearly three weeks ago -- it's difficult to ignore the economic and environmental impacts of our changing climate. Experts say property damage from this one storm could top \$50 billion.

Californians also face increasing threats from climate change. Our future depends on how we place our bets today. California is anticipating an economic boom from transitioning to a clean, efficient economy through voter-supported Assembly Bill 32, the state's clean energy and climate law.

As an economist and climate scientist, I believe we can have both a strong economy and a healthy environment, and I support how the state is placing its bet on the success of policies like AB 32.

I recently published a series of research papers about the threats of wildfires to California and the American West as our climate warms. We're already seeing an increase in the frequency of large, damaging wildfires. Snow is melting earlier in the year, and we're getting much longer fire seasons.

Like hurricanes, wildfires are costly natural disasters. Putting them out costs more than \$1 billion each year -- not to mention the cost to replace businesses and homes destroyed. Fortunately, California is already taking steps to address these threats, while simultaneously strengthening the economy.

For too long, polluters have been spewing greenhouse gases into our air without any limits or restrictions. California is now holding them accountable.

No company should be given property rights in the public commons. Clean, healthy air belongs to you and me, and all Californians. The state has put safeguards in place through AB 32, to ensure polluters are responsible for monitoring, reporting and reducing their emissions.

Despite industry attacks on AB 32 and its carbon trading program, which held its first auction for pollution permits this week, it is actually a simple mechanism. Not to mention, it was first developed and implemented during the pro-business Reagan

Administration as a means of addressing acid rain.

The basic premise is this: companies are given a pollution limit, but it is up to them to figure out how to meet the standard. The program provides maximum flexibility, but creates an incentive for efficiency, innovation and technology.

AB 32 is just the latest evidence of California's legacy of leadership, which has propelled us to the position of the world's ninth largest economy and established the state as a laboratory for innovation. There is well-established evidence that market incentives drive innovation and attract investment to California -- \$2.8 billion in clean-tech investment, more than all other states combined.

A carbon market will provide financial incentives for polluters to reduce emissions and will let California's most inventive, best-managed firms reap the benefits. Carbon markets can help transform the way we make, use and conserve energy by putting a price on inefficiency. They help shift spending away from polluting goods and services to clean ones.

This week's carbon auction marks an important step toward a clean, efficient economy.

