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## **Air district recognizes clean-burning technology**

By Steve Goldstein, president of The Spa Doctor & Stove Center in Modesto.

As everyone who lives here knows, the Central Valley has been plagued with a pollution problem that rears its ugly head every winter — air pollution from wood smoke — and the San Joaquin Valley Air District has been charged with the unbelievably difficult task of cleaning it up.

In their valiant efforts they have implemented various measures to reach "attainment" — to meet the federal standards as set forth by the Clean Air Act. One of the most publicly recognized measure is wood-burning curtailments or, as some like to call it, a "wood- burning ban." Though never intended to be a total ban, these restrictions have been seen by some as overly restrictive.

The hearth industry, makers and sellers of wood and pellet stoves, set out in the early 1990s to comply with the EPA's requirement to produce only clean-burning hearth appliances. The industry met that challenge and, over the years, has continued its quest for perfection in its technology. The end result is that today we have wood and pellet stoves that burn so cleanly, so efficiently, that there is literally zero visible smoke when used properly.

But, with its mandate, the Air District has allowed even these clean-burning, EPA-certified products to fall under the same restrictions as any open hearth fireplace or old, smoke-belching, uncertified wood stoves ... until now. On Dec. 20, the air district staff announced to the Board of Directors that it will now recognize the value these products bring to the local airshed and are part of the solution to the air quality problem. With the announcement of lesser restriction on EPA-certified wood and pellet stoves, the district will now recognize the reduction in emissions these products provide.

While open-hearth fireplaces and old, uncertified wood stoves can produce as much as 75-100 grams of particulate matter per hour, the new clean-burning appliances — both wood and pellet — can produce as little as 1 gram per hour ... or less. The innovations bring not only warmth and economy to the homeowner, but they are also considered a part of the greater good of clearing the air. And the air district now agrees — burning cleanly is a far better alternative than using old technology.

At Thursday's board meeting, board members and the public combined to deliver the message that those who invest in this technology should be recognized and rewarded for their efforts and investment. The end result is that the staff at the air district agreed to allow these EPA-certified wood and pellet stoves to be used on certain days when the air quality is "marginal." The exact levels of the Air Quality Index whereby these modern appliances can be used when others cannot has yet to be determined, but the message of Thursday's meeting is clear: EPA- certified and -exempt stoves and inserts will be allowed on days when open hearth and noncertified wood burning will not.

In other words, those who have invested in clean-burning technology will finally be rewarded.

Residents throughout the Central Valley voiced their concerns after the October board meeting when they discovered the district's intentions to amend the current wood-burning rules. Those who have already invested in clean-burning technology wanted the district to know that the investment they have made in EPA-certified products has never been rewarded because the existing burn curtailments have never allowed any exemption for EPA-certified wood or pellet stoves.

With the new rules that will be implemented in the coming months, those who invest in clean-burning technology will be rewarded. During certain marginal air quality days during the winter, those with clean technology will be allowed to use their appliances to heat their homes in an economical, environmentally friendly manner.

The people spoke, the air district listened, and we can now all breathe a little easier.