

## Valley Air District implements new burn rules

By Laura Liera

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Feel free to fill your lungs the next time you step outside because our air is the cleanest it's been in the post-industrial history of the San Joaquin Valley.

Overall, air quality in the Central Valley -- for both ozone levels (summer) and particulate matter (winter) -- is the cleanest and healthiest it's been since anyone has been paying serious attention. The valley is meeting Environmental Protection Agency standards.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District enforces pollution-reduction rules set by the EPA -- but that federal agency changes its standards every five years, creating new challenges for the valley air district.

In an effort to stay on top of those evolving standards, the air district has established some new policies, and Seyed Sadredin, executive director and chief air pollution control officer, dropped in at The Californian's webcast studios Monday to talk about them. Specifically, he wanted to discuss the new Check Before You Burn rule that goes into effect Saturday -- and a new \$2.5 million fireplace upgrade incentive program.

"This action is great news for valley residents who are interested in changing out polluting wood-burning devices with cleaner units," he said Monday on "First Look with Scott Cox."

During the Check Before You Burn season, which runs from Nov. 1 through February, the air district will issue three declarations instead of two. The levels are: No Burning, No Restrictions/Burning Discouraged and the newest one, No Burning Unless Registered. The new category allows those who have registered clean fireplaces to burn fires far more often this coming winter. Registered fireplaces emit 20 to 50 times less air pollution compared to the typical open fireplace.

"Those that have invested in those units need to actually be rewarded for investing in clean air and be able to use their fireplace more," Sadredin said.

Based on the forecast each day, the district will issue the burn level. If the pollution is forecast to be less than 20 micrograms per cubic meter, there are no restrictions. If the air pollution is between 20 and 65 mpcm, only people with registered units can burn and nobody else can. And if it's over 65 micrograms, nobody can burn.

"If you have a clean EPA unit, you can burn pretty much all winter," Sadredin said.

Hundreds of fireplace units that qualify as safe burning units are listed on the valley district's website, he added.

The district has allocated \$2.5 million to be used for the replacement of older, high-polluting wood burning devices for newer, cleaner units through the Burn Cleaner program for fireplace and wood stove change-outs.

Extra funding has increased the incentive amount to \$1,500 per device, up from \$500; and \$2,500 for a new wood burning unit for low income residents, up from \$1,500.

"In our estimate, this is the most cost-effective, least costly rule we could adopt to reduce air pollution in a significant way compared to what could be done to businesses," the executive director noted.

The new rule is intended to reduce particulate air pollution by five tons a day.

Residential burning contributes 13 percent of the total winter PM2.5 emissions. During the worst winter days, up to a third of all particulate pollution comes from people burning wood in their fireplaces or wood-burning units.

Sadredin said valley businesses are already subject to the toughest air regulations in the nation and have spent more than \$40 billion to reduce air pollution.

"Pollution in the valley from businesses has reduced by more than 80 percent over the past 25 years," he said.

Although the federal government changes its standards every five years, the district supports the regulations because the end result is less pollution. But Sadredin wishes the EPA would give the district more time to meet those standards.

"Right now the federal law does not recognize the degree of difficulty that a particular region faces in meeting these standards," he said.

As the district moves forward with new fireplace regulations, Sadredin wants to assure people that the changes they are making are showing positive results.

Air pollution has been reduced by 85 percent in the last couple of years, he said. Last summer, the valley set records for clean smog ozone readings despite triple-digit temperatures. Also, for the second year in a row, the valley had zero violations of the one hour ozone standard -- an issue that prompted state officials to inflict a \$29 million penalty on valley residents.

### **Blessing of the Bikes promotes safe riding**

Stockton Record, Friday, October 24, 2014

Bikes and riders of all shapes and sizes were on hand on Oct. 18 as Pastor Monsignor Larry McGovern presided over the Blessing of the Bikes event at Church of the Presentation in Stockton.

The Environmental Justice event was held to promote safe bike riding, education about air quality issues and encourage bike riding to "care for God's creation." Raffle prizes were provided by Valley Air District, which donated two bicycles (boys and girls) with helmets and locks, and five refurbished bicycles were donated by the San Joaquin County ReBicycle Project. Performance Bicycles also contributed biking equipment to the raffle prizes.

The City of Stockton Public Works Department displayed maps for planned bike routes and lanes. Catholic Charities Environmental Justice shared information on climate change and air quality; San Joaquin County Sheriff's Department motorcycle officers promoted bike safety on the road; and the San Joaquin Bicycle Coalition coordinated a children's bike rodeo.

Blessing of the Bikes was held to mark October as Respect Life Month in the Catholic Diocese.