

Check Before You Burn season begins

By María G. Ortiz-Briones

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FRESNO — If you live between Bakersfield and Stockton, be aware of the new rules for using your fireplace starting Saturday (Nov. 1).

The San Joaquín Valley Air Pollution Control District is trying to educate people about the unhealthiness of using wood-burning fireplaces.

The district's board adopted changes to the Check Before You Burn rules that aim to reduce critical winter air pollution while allowing residences with cleaner units to use them more frequently than in the past.

"The cooperation and understanding of the Valley's residents has made this the single most effective regulation the air district has adopted," said Seyed Sadredin, district executive director.

Sadredin said that thanks to residents' support, "our winter air quality is much cleaner and much healthier."

Check Before You Burn season runs through the end of February, said Maricela Velásquez, bilingual outreach and communications representative.

During the burn season, the air district will issue daily wood-burning forecasts for each county in the district.

The forecasts will be: "No restrictions, burning discouraged," "No burning unless registered," or "no burning."

Velásquez said the new change is that residents who have registered their emission-compliant, wood-burning fireplaces with the district will be allowed to burn during days when the forecast is "no burning unless registered."

However, when the forecast is "no burning," no wood-burning fireplace may be used regardless if they are registered or not.

Residents can register their wood-burning units for free with the air district by visiting www.valleyair.org/CBYBregistration.

Velásquez said there are two exceptions to the wood-burning rules:

If the residence does not have another source of heat or,

If the residence does not have access to natural-gas service.

She said that fireplaces, stoves and inserts that run on gas or propane continue to be exempt.

Velásquez said the air district is also offering incentives to Valley residents to replace older burning units with newer, cleaner devices that meet the current EPA emission standards such as a natural gas insert.

Velásquez said the incentives offered are \$1,500 to eligible applicants and \$2,500 to qualified low-income applicants to "help offset the cost of the device."

Another \$500 is available to all applicants who need gas installed for their new devices.

The district is accepting applications for its Burn Cleaner Program, she said, adding that so far more than 500 applications have been received.

Velásquez said applications are available in English and Spanish and applications would be accepted until the program runs out of money.

The program hopes to help reduce pollution produced from older devices in the Valley which contribute to bad air quality during the fall and winter months.

Velásquez said people are realizing that burning emissions are "impacting their health and quality of life." To be eligible for the incentive program, the old device must be located at a residence within the district boundaries.