

More no-burn days in S.J. County

By Alex Breitler, Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Another year, another record number of no-burn days in San Joaquin County.

But it wasn't that way for everyone.

For the first time this winter, residents who had installed cleaner-burning fireplace inserts or gas stoves were almost always allowed to keep burning, even when their neighbors were not.

How'd it turn out? The numbers tell the story: Those with older, dirty stoves or open fireplaces were prohibited from burning 59 times — or roughly every other day. That's never happened before.

Those who had upgraded, however, were prevented from burning just once all winter.

Add to that the fact that the Valley's air quality improved compared to last winter, and officials said the revamped program appears to be working.

"The point is that we saw a reduction in pollution at the same time that residents who had cleaner burning devices were able to burn (almost) all the time," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The district offered hefty rebates to help residents pay for the upgrade. Almost 900 vouchers for rebates have been issued in San Joaquin County, for a total of more than \$1.5 million. That's a significant chunk of the \$6.6 million awarded across the entire eight-county Valley.

"The response we received to these changes (in the rules) was enthusiastic," Seyed Sadredin, the air district's general manager, said in a prepared statement.

Funding for the rebates is beginning to run low, Presto said, but people can continue to apply and more money may be made available next year. Visit valleyair.org or call (209) 557-6400.

A closer look

Until 2008, wood-burning bans were rare in San Joaquin County. Then, officials tightened the rules. Here's what has happened since:

- 2008-09: 24 no-burn days
- 2009-10: 21 no-burn days
- 2010-11: 7 no-burn days
- 2011-12: 29 no-burn days
- 2012-13: 21 no-burn days
- 2013-14: 45 no-burn days
- 2014-15: 59 no-burn days*

*The standard tightened again this year, but those who upgraded to cleaner stoves or inserts were allowed to burn on all but one day of the winter.