

Fireplace rules kick in today

By Alex Breitler

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Fresh off Stockton's wettest October in a decade, annual fireplace burning restrictions go into effect today across the San Joaquin Valley.

If the recent precipitation continues in the months to come, residents likely will be allowed to burn more often than the winter of 2014-15, when burning was outlawed a record 58 days, or roughly half the season.

Indeed, fireplace burning was banned just 36 times last winter thanks to the return of a reasonable amount of rain to wash out dangerous pollutants.

If relying on the weather isn't enough, however, residents still have the option of upgrading from an open fireplace or old wood stove to a cleaner-burning device. Under Valley air officials' recently redesigned system, those who upgrade are allowed to burn more often. In fact, last year they were allowed to burn all winter long.

"The biggest thing people could do is to burn cleanly and to upgrade if they're not already using an EPA-certified stove," said Anthony Presto, a spokesman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

After two years of ramping up, the new system becomes permanent this year, which means those who have upgraded already must have their new device registered. A professional must complete an inspection to make sure the device has been installed and that it's working properly, Presto said.

Once that hurdle is out of the way, owners will have a three-year permit that will allow them to burn on all but the most polluted of days.

Incentives are still available to upgrade, Presto said, including \$1,000 for a new EPA-certified wood stove, pellet stove or gas insert, plus another \$500 to help pay for installation for those getting the gas insert.

For low-income residents, the incentive amounts to \$2,500, not counting the extra \$500 for gas.

Those who go all the way to gas, of course, aren't subject to the wood-burning rules at all.

"You'll never have to worry about whether or not it's a day that you can burn wood," Presto said.

For everyone else, whether they've upgraded or not, the air district recommends calling (800) 766-4463 to find out if it's a legal burn day. Last year 77 notices of violation were written to residents who broke the rules in San Joaquin County alone; more than 400 were written Valleywide.

Burn-day information and more details on how to apply for incentives or register a new stove or insert can also be found at tinyurl.com/checkbeforeyouburn.

"No Burn" Day Persist Into Winter In The San Joaquin Valley

By Rich Ibarra

Capital Public Radio, Monday, October 31, 2016

Starting Nov. 1 and through the end of February, residents from Stockton to Bakersfield will likely see many no burn days.

That's the season when air quality can suffer and burning wood in the fireplace or an old wood stove are not allowed.

Anthony Presto with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District says last year rainy days helped to reduce pollution along with the use of cleaner certified stoves.

"Not only did the weather cooperate with what we were trying to do but we had more residents in the valley that are registering their wood burning devices which led to a much cleaner year with better air quality," Presto says.

According to Presto, people couldn't use their fireplaces for 36 days in San Joaquin County last season, and 50 days in Stanislaus County.

He says people must confirm each day with the district before burning by checking the website, phone or with a new iPhone app that provides that information.