

As cold weather rolls in, Kern residents encouraged to 'check before you burn'

By Sam Morgen

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It's that time of year again. The weather is getting colder. The season is getting merrier. And for those who might want to warm things up a little with a crackling fire, it's time to check before you burn.

Back for its 17th season, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has launched its "Check Before You Burn" program that runs from November through the end of February. The program intends to keep air quality in the Central Valley under control by limiting smoke caused by fires, particularly wood fires. Those fires release particulate matter that is kept near ground level where it can be a hazard to public health.

"Thanks to public cooperation, valley air is getting cleaner, which has a direct, positive impact on public health," District Executive Director and Air Pollution Control Officer Samir Sheikh said in a news release. "The public's continued support of the Check Before You Burn Program is critical to the health and quality of life for all valley residents and reaching our clean air goals."

Every day for the duration of the season, the district will release three declarations for eight Central Valley counties. Those declarations — "Burning Discouraged," "No Burning Unless Registered," and "No Burning For All" — govern the activity that may take place in any given region.

"Burning Discouraged" means burning is allowed, but the wood being burned should be clean, seasoned and dry. Trash, magazines, newspapers, plastics or other material not designed to be burned in fireplaces and stoves is not allowed, according to the district's website.

"No Burning Unless Registered" restricts burning only for those who have a registered clean burning device.

"No Burning For All" prohibits all burning — even wood pellets and Duraflame logs — from being burned, and violations can result in fines. Only those who live in an area without natural gas service, or who use wood burning as their only source of heat, can burn on these days.

On Monday, burning was totally restricted for the San Joaquin Valley portion of Kern County, while those with clean burning devices can burn Tuesday.

To check the burn designations, visit checkbeforeyouburn.org, call 1-800-SMOG INFO (766-4463), or download the "Valley Air" app.