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Attn: Local news, weather and assignment editors

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2019-2020 Check Before You Burn season cleanest on record

Saturday, February 29, marked the end of the Valley's 17th Check Before You Burn season. Despite record-breaking high winds at the beginning of the season, the remainder of the season was the cleanest in recorded history.

The Check Before You Burn Program takes place each winter from November through February, minimizing the build-up of harmful fine particulate matter pollution (PM2.5), which can have adverse effects on public health, aggravating heart and lung diseases such as asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Regional high pressure systems often cause pollutants to become trapped in the bowl-shaped San Joaquin Valley, creating high concentrations of PM2.5, that build up very quickly at ground level, resulting in poor air quality. Throughout the season, increased cooperation by Valley residents and the use of much cleaner wood, pellet & natural gas devices, made possible by the District's Burn Cleaner Program, all played pivotal roles in the vast improvement to wintertime air quality this season.

"Once again, the District thanks residents, businesses, the ag industry and all other Valley stakeholders for helping to achieve our cleanest winter on record," said Valley Air District Executive Director and Air Pollution Control Officer, Samir Sheikh.

In accordance with Rule 4901, the District issues a daily wood-burning declaration, based on the air quality forecast for each county with one of three specific designations: "No Burning for All," "No Burning Unless Registered," or "Burning Discouraged." While no formal burning restrictions are in place from now through the end of October, the District discourages all residential wood burning.

In 2019, the District adopted amendments to Rule 4901 to lower the "No Burning Unless Registered" and "No Burning for All" thresholds in the three counties with the biggest air pollution challenges: Madera, Fresno, and Kern. The lower threshold led to more frequent health-protective wood burning curtailments in these "Hot Spot" counties during the 2019-2020 winter season.

Residents interested in upgrading from an open-hearth fireplace or older wood stove, to a cleaner device, are encouraged to take advantage of the District's Burn Cleaner incentive program, which provides \$1,000 for certified wood/pellet inserts, freestanding stoves or natural gas inserts. Low income residents are eligible for \$2,500 to purchase such devices. An additional \$500 is also available toward installation costs for natural gas devices over wood or pellet. Visit www.valleyair.org/burncleaner for program guidelines. In the Hot-Spot counties of Madera, Fresno, and Kern, the Burn Cleaner program offers \$3,000, regardless of income level, to upgrade from a wood/pellet device to natural gas.

Additionally, March through October is a great time to get clean burning devices registered, before the next Check Before You Burn season begins. Visit www.valleyair.org/CBYBregistration for details.

County	No Burning Unless Registered		No Burning for All		Notices of Violation*	
	2018-2019	2019-2020	2018-2019	2019-2020	2018-2019	2019-2020
Hot Spot Counties						
Madera	35	81	5	2	18	32
Fresno	54	95	5	4	150	202
Kern	44	88	6	10	58	74
Kern (Greater Frazier Park Area)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Hot Spot Counties						
San Joaquin	40	47	10	0	109	61
Stanislaus	37	49	10	0	100	75
Merced	33	27	8	0	59	32
Kings	50	57	13	11	17	11
Tulare	52	56	5	1	42	16
Sequoia National Park & Forest	14	2	7	0	0	0
Totals:	359	502	69	28	553	503

*Violations of wood-burning curtailments can result in fines.

For more information on the Check Before You Burn Program, visit: www.valleyair.org/rule4901/ or call District offices in Fresno (559-230-6000), Modesto (209-557-6400) or Bakersfield (661-392-5500).