

News Release

Friday, May 18, 2007
For Immediate Release



San Joaquin Valley
AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT

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TO:
Local news, business and
agriculture sections

Air District imposes more burn restrictions on farmers

(May 18) –The Governing Board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District voted Thursday to prohibit burning of orchard removals starting June 1. As a result, farmers must start using alternative methods to dispose of orchard-removal waste, such as chipping or mulching.

The new ruling is expected to reduce nearly 2,400 tons per year of smog-forming and particle emissions Valley-wide. Specifically, the rule reduces 811 tons per year of volatile organic compounds, 644 tons of nitrogen oxides and 938 tons of particulate matter ten microns and smaller (PM10). The Air District has acted twice before to reduce agricultural burning; the first action in 2004 restricted the burning of diseased crops and the second in 2005 affected field crops. Orchard removals represent about 50 percent of all agricultural burning in the Valley.

As prescribed by the state law (SB 705, Florez) that mandates phasing out agricultural burning, the rule adopted yesterday allows for minor exceptions in situations where feasible alternatives to burning don't currently exist. Although the law doesn't specify a deadline for the exemptions to be lifted, the board voted in the interest of public health to shorten the timeframe from 2015 to 2010.

The extension was granted for citrus, apple, pear, quince and fig orchards, as well as rice, because these crops either can contain a pervasive tree disease that is transferable unless the waste is burned, or because an alternative disposal method doesn't exist. Orchard removals 20 acres or smaller were granted the extension because the cost of alternative disposal methods would be between 18 and 252 percent, or higher, of the farmers' net profits per acre.

The exempt orchards make up only ten percent of the Valley's total emissions from agricultural burning. Burning still won't be allowed on smoggy days in the Valley or during conditions that could lead to a violation of federal air-quality standards.

"The state legislature can give us more tools to facilitate alternatives to open burning that are economically feasible," said Seyed Sadredin, the District's Air Pollution Control Officer and Executive Director.

For example, Sadredin said, burning of chipped agricultural waste at biomass power plants is a cleaner alternative than open burning. But biomass facilities don't have an incentive to use agricultural waste.

"Due to the state's dysfunctional energy policy, it doesn't make economic sense for a biomass power plant to use large amounts of agricultural waste as fuel," Sadredin said. He added that the Air District will ask state legislators - including Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, who wrote the

law on agricultural burning restrictions -- to author legislation offering biomass power plants a higher price for the electricity they sell to utilities and to require a greater use of agricultural waste.

The Valley Air District covers eight counties including San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and the valley portion of Kern. For more information, contact the nearest District office in Modesto at (209) 557-6440, Fresno (559) 230-6000 or Bakersfield (661) 326-6900.

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