

## **Better air quality enjoyed this winter**

The Taft Midway Driller

By Midway Driller staff

February 27, 2004

The outstanding cooperation of Valley residents this winter in voluntarily curtailing their fireplace and woodstove use resulted in fewer days than originally anticipated that burning was prohibited.

This was the first winter that Valley residents were prohibited by the Valley Air District from burning fireplaces, woodstoves and other wood-burning heaters during periods of unhealthy air quality. But as the wood-burning season officially comes to an end Feb. 29, Valley Air District officials say even voluntary self-curtailment by residents helped reduce wintertime air pollution.

"Valley residents refrained from burning this winter, not only on days when no burning was allowed but also on days when they were discouraged from burning," said

Dave Crow, the District's Air Pollution Control Officer. "Their actions definitely helped improve the Valley's wintertime air quality. People saw the value of not burning and that has allowed Valley residents to breathe easier."

District officials expect the season to end Sunday night with wood-burning bans on just two days since Nov. 1 in the eight-county District. Wood-burning curtailment days -when burning was prohibited - were called Nov. 18 in Fresno and Kern county and in Fresno County only on Jan. 23.

Supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp said the District had expected 20 to 25 curtailment days this year, based on previous winters.

"That has been our experience over the past three years of measuring. This year was difficult to forecast because particulate levels were only slightly above health standards. In previous years, the highest winter AQIs were greater than 200. This year, the highest concentrations seen on our real-time monitors were 154 in Bakersfield, 153 in Fresno and 155 in Modesto."

Preliminary analysis indicates that people stopped burning when a curtailment day was called.

"Perhaps the most significant aspect of this measure is the 'burning discouraged' calls made by the District," Crow said. "It is clear from the public's response to this advisory that AQI levels of 151 or higher were averted, thus reducing the number of expected prohibitions."

## **Regulations on wood-burning end today [sic]**

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Turlock-area residents who love to curl up in front of a blazing wood fire can rest easy - this winter's mandatory wood-burning regulations end on Sunday.

Despite the fact that the season's rainfall helped clean the air, officials from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District say it's the "outstanding cooperation of Valley residents this winter in voluntarily curtailing their fireplace and woodstove use resulted in fewer days than originally anticipated that burning was prohibited."

Between Nov. 1 and now, Stanislaus County only had 32 days where wood burning was "discouraged." This request left it up to the person to decide whether or not to burn.

Residents were asked to check daily air quality conditions before lighting fires, and were discouraged from burning when the Air Quality Index was between 101 and 150.

"Valley residents refrained from burning this winter, not only on days when no burning was allowed, but also on days when they were discouraged from burning," said Dave Crow, the district's air pollution control officer.

“Their actions definitely helped improve the Valley’s wintertime air quality,” he added. “People saw the value of not burning and that has allowed Valley residents to breathe easier.”

Eight counties, including Stanislaus, are covered by the district’s regulations. Mandatory no-burn days were only announced for Nov. 18 in Fresno and Kern counties, and on Jan. 23 in Fresno County.

Supervising meteorologist Evan Shipp said the district had expected 20 to 25 mandatory “no burn” days this year, based on previous winters.

“That has been our experience over the past three years of measuring,” Shipp said. “This year was difficult to forecast because particulate levels were only slightly above health standards.”

In previous years, he said, the highest winter AQIs were greater than 200. This year, the highest concentrations were 154 in Bakersfield, 153 in Fresno and 155 in Modesto.

But the weather this winter also played an important role in helping keep the air clean.

“In past years, weather patterns have been stable for longer periods,” Shipp said. “When this happens, wood smoke and emissions from morning traffic cause air pollution to rise to unhealthy levels.

“We didn’t have those long, stagnant periods this winter,” he added.

According to the district, preliminary analysis indicates that people stopped burning when a curtailment day was announced.

“Perhaps the most significant aspect of this measure is the ‘burning discouraged’ calls made by the district,” said Crow.

He added that the public’s response to the advisory was the reason very unhealthy air quality levels were averted.

“It’s this kind of public awareness and action that will bode well for improving wintertime air quality,” he said.

The 25,000-square-mile San Joaquin Valley is among eight areas in the country considered seriously out of compliance with federal standards for particulate matter - found in the winter in wood smoke. Due to the severity of the Valley’s wintertime air pollution, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency required the district to reduce particulate matter emissions valley-wide.

Residential wood burning can add more than 24 tons per day of harmful soot, dust and ash particles to Valley air quality problems.

The district’s wood-burning rule has two other components aimed at improving wintertime air quality.

It limits the number of wood-burning devices allowed in new residential developments and requires that any woodstove or fireplace insert left in a home when it is sold or transferred meet 1990 EPA emissions standards.

For more information on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, visit [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org).

**Number of people with asthma up 4% in U.S., CDC reports**

News Brief, Published in the Orange County Register  
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ATLANTA The number of Americans with asthma rose about 4 percent in 2002, and minority groups have a more difficult time controlling the disease than whites, federal officials said Thursday.

About 7.5 percent of Americans reported having asthma in 2002 - the most recent year figures are available, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said. That is up from 7.2 percent from 2001 - an increase of about 4 percent.

About 16 million Americans have asthma, the CDC said.

Experts said they do not know why rates are on the rise, although it is possible that the disease is diagnosed more often, said Jeanne Moorman, one of the study's authors.

Asthma has been on the rise since 1980. Between 1980 and 1996, cases nearly doubled from 3 percent to 5.5 percent of the population. CDC researchers do not compare those numbers with the most recent data because they have changed their survey questions since 1996.

### **Kern farmers applaud timing of big break in utility bills**

The Bakersfield Californian  
MARYLEE SHRIDER, Californian staff writer  
February 27, 2004  
Section: A Section; Page: A1

Kern County farmers gearing up for the summer planting season say electricity rate cuts approved Thursday by the California Public Utilities Commission couldn't have come at a better time. The commission approved a rate decrease of 15 percent for agricultural operators as part of the \$799 million reduction in rates for customers of Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

"The best solution to clean air in the valley is to make these rates more competitive," said Jason Selvidge, a partner with the Buttonwillow Land and Cattle Co. "It's easiest to use electric wells but, for most farmers, it's been cheaper to run diesel and natural gas motors."

Customer groups hit with the largest rate increases early in 2001 will receive the largest reductions -- from 9 percent to 15 percent based on their size and usage.

Michael Boccadoro, executive director of the Agricultural Energy Consumers Association, said the 15 percent reduction is guaranteed to hold for at least a year, until the next rate adjustment.

The decrease, he said, will be a relief to farmers already struggling with stagnant prices and rising production costs.

"With regulatory burdens the way they are, this is the one area we're seeing some relief," Boccadoro said. "In an era where everything is going up, it's nice to see at least one component of business going down."

The lowered rates will begin to show up on customers' bills in March. The timing for farmers couldn't be better because the electric pumps required to irrigate crops must be ramped up beginning this month.

Blake Sanden, irrigation management adviser with the UC Cooperative Extension in Bakersfield, said the rate reduction could save thousands for farmers who routinely pay as much as \$60 an acre-foot for the power that pumps irrigation water.

"This 14 percent can mean significant savings to growers, depending upon the kind of system they're running," Sanden said. "But any reduction is going to be a relief."

The rate cut, which will be retroactive to Jan. 1, is part of PG&E's emergence from bankruptcy.

Selvidge said he and his partners have kept the farming operation on all-electric wells for air quality reasons, but in recent years have considered the switch to diesel.

"We're one of the few that's still mostly electric," he said. "We've always hoped we'd get enough of a rate break to keep from converting over."

[Editorial in the Turlock Journal](#)

### **Let's keep the momentum going**

Friday, February 27, 2004

By the Editorial Board

Turlock residents who love to curl up in front of a roaring wood fire can now rest easy - this winter's mandatory wood-burning regulations are about to end.

For four months - from the beginning of November to the end of February - Central Valley residents were placed under new regulations governing the use of wood-burning fireplaces and stoves. On days when the air quality was deemed bad enough, there were requests for people not to burn wood, or even bans altogether.

And it seems these regulations went a long way this winter in helping keep our air cleaner. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District - which is charged with cleaning up the air from Bakersfield to Stockton - has applauded Valley residents for doing their part this winter.

While the amount of rain we've had recently certainly hasn't hurt, it's good to see that the program is being deemed a success.

The winter's wood-burning regulations - no matter how restricting some people think they might have been - are a prime example of how Valley residents can work together to make our collective region a better place in which to live.

Over the last four months, we proved that we can make a difference, and that's a good feeling.

While we have to wonder what motivated people not to burn on certain bad air days, we hope that the Journal's daily burn status on the front page of the paper helped keep the issue in the forefront of people's minds.

The quality of our air - at least in the winter - is just one of the issues we all face on a daily basis. But there are other issues that need to be tackled on a regional basis, such as the need for upgrades and improvements to our north-south thoroughfare.

By sticking together, county beside county, the Central Valley can become a better place for all of us.

We hope that, even though the wood-burning regulations will be lifted Sunday, those who enjoy a fire during the last few cooler weeks of the season will still keep in mind that air quality is more important than an extra degree on the thermostat.

And as the summer draws ever closer, and we're faced with the smog that is an inevitable byproduct of highway traffic, it's important to remember that we've taken a giant step this winter.

Let's see our collective concern for the environment continue.

[Letter to the Editor, The Bakersfield Californian](#)

### **Voters: Be informed**

February 27, 2004

The time for us to vote is rapidly approaching. I encourage voters to be informed on the issues and to know the candidates, especially their voting records.

We just went through a painful and costly recall election. In reality, each election is a recall. If you disagree with how you are being represented, incumbents have not earned your vote and it is time to give someone an opportunity to represent you. You should not be swayed by someone on television or an endorsement telling you how to use your vote.

Each voter must ask the questions: Did this representative have my best interest at heart when he voted for mega-dairies in metropolitan Bakersfield? Was I being represented when three-mile buffer zones for dairies were voted down? Voters need to know where candidates stand on such important issues as economic development (dairies versus non-polluting light industry), air quality and ridiculously low traffic impact fees.

Daily, when I get the air quality report, usually unhealthful, or find myself driving in heavy traffic on inadequate roads, I ask who represented me in creating this mess?

In the case of dairies, the flies, odor, particulates in the air and groundwater contamination yet to come, I feel no one was representing me.

I urge voters to evaluate the quality of their representation and decide if anyone needs to be recalled in an efficient, simple manner by voting for change and giving someone new an opportunity to represent us.

-- BILL DESCARY, Bakersfield