

Get cozy by the fire -- while you can

By Sarah Ruby, staff writer

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Nothing now stands between you and your fireplace except the warm weather.

Tuesday was the last day of the no-burn season, during which wood fires are banned on days the air is unhealthy for everybody. The season runs from November through February.

Despite leading the San Joaquin Valley in no-burn days this year, Kern residents were far from the most egregious in terms of lighting up illegally -- or at least in getting caught.

With 71 violations, Fresno County residents took home more than twice as many no-burn tickets as Kern's.

It could be that Fresno residents report violators more frequently, said Kelly Morphy, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The district will analyze the numbers, she said. On no-burn days, district inspectors patrolled neighborhoods and responded to complaints, doling out \$50 tickets to violators. The restrictions are meant to keep bad-air days from getting worse.

The problem is particulate pollution, or combustion dust, which is generated by engines, industry and fires, among other sources. Particulates lodge deep in the lungs, aggravating asthma and heart disease and, in some cases, killing people.

Wood smoke in urban Bakersfield contributes 12 to 21 percent of particulates on bad-air days, according to the air district. It contributes slightly more in Fresno.

Whatever the percentage, it's enough to justify regulating residential wood burning, said Tom Jordan, who helped devise the district's fireplace rule.

"We regulate industries that are 1 percent of the problem," he said.

This season's stagnant weather is the reason we had so many more no-burn days than last season. When it first adopted the fireplace rule, the district estimated we'd have as many as 25 no-burn days per season.

Last year was the aberration, not this year, Jordan said.

"It seems like we're really ramping up, but it was just really good luck in those first years," he said.

Valley air district to collect development fee as part of unique program

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, March 1, 2006

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's fee for new housing and commercial development takes effect today.

By 2010, the rule is expected to cut particulates and smog-forming nitrogen oxides by 10.5 tons per day, according to the air district.

The air district will evaluate new building projects and assess how much additional pollution they would contribute through car trips, lawn equipment, etc. Developers can then pay a fee to offset a

portion of that pollution off-site, or they can incorporate air-friendly features on-site, such as bike lanes, public transit corridors and mixed retail/residential buildings.

The district is the first air agency in the United States to implement a program like this, according to the district.

The district expects to review 1,200 projects each year. It will likely collect \$103 million in the first three years, according to district calculations.

Air rule may raise building costs
Regulations aim to target indirect pollutants
Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, March 1, 2006

A new air quality rule that goes into effect today requires San Joaquin Valley builders to make their projects environmentally friendly or pay financial penalties.

Designed to be a pre-emptive strike on pollution, the rule is hailed by air quality proponents. But some in Tulare County say the new standards could raise the cost of construction or discourage new building.

Kelly Morphy, spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said the new regulations are aimed at indirect sources that create a significant amount of air pollution.

These sources include vehicle emissions and particulates released during construction.

New projects, Morphy said, create emissions both during the construction phase and when the project is operational.

"For example, if it is a commercial center, there are vehicle miles that are created just because of that commercial center being there and the developers are required to mitigate a certain percentage of those emissions," Morphy said.

Morphy said the most cost-effective way for developers to reduce emissions, and reduce fees, is to incorporate air-friendly designs into their projects.

"Making the projects walker-friendly, bicycle-friendly, so that people are encouraged to not drive their cars," Morphy said. "Incorporating videoconferencing into commercial centers, making houses more energy efficient, things like that, get emission reductions right off the bat by the way the project's designed."

Once a developer submits a project to the air district, a computer program analyzes the plans to determine the emissions created by the project. If the reduction methods included in the project don't lower air pollution emissions enough to meet the standard, the developer can resubmit the plan with changes, apply to defer the fees or pay a fee to compensate for the emissions, Morphy said.

Money generated by the fees will go into a fund administered by the air district for projects including replacement of dirty diesel engines, subsidizing transit or funding bike paths, Morphy said.

Stephanie Moen, project director for the Tulare County Asthma Coalition, sees the new rule as a way to improve the health of asthmatics in the San Joaquin Valley.

"The impact from pollution, from both mobile and stationary sources, is affecting the health of the people that live in our area," Moen said. "Our goal is to reduce asthma triggers, triggers that create asthma episodes and one of those is air pollution, both ozone and particulate matter."

Moen cited statistics from the California Health Interview Survey conducted by UCLA in 2003.

"In a telephone study in Tulare County, 23 percent of the children ages 5 to 17 stated that they had been diagnosed with asthma," Moen said. "The national average for those diagnosed with asthma was 6 percent."

Moen said the new rule will absolutely help to reduce pollution emissions.

"It's a simple way to decrease the pollution equation," Moen said. "It's giving alternative methods to creating a healthy environment, healthy neighborhood. It will decrease the tailpipe pollution. It's going to give alternatives for people traveling, whether it be bike paths or bike racks."

Bob Keenan, executive vice president of the Building Industry Association of Tulare/Kings Counties, said the rule, by focusing on the builders, would have financial consequences for local communities by increasing the cost of building new projects.

Keenan said the rule unfairly makes builders responsible for vehicle emissions that they have no control over.

"It is based on the number of trips your site generates, so it's basically making people who want to build businesses or houses responsible for people driving cars," Keenan said.

"It will have an economic cost to the central valley in jobs, in the production of schools, government buildings, you name it. Recreation centers, commercial, industrial, business expansions, new churches, new hospitals, they are all affected."

Mark Fulmer, assistant superintendent of administrative services for Visalia Unified School District, agrees with Keenan that the rule will increase the cost of building schools, although he's not sure by how much.

"We're just trying to look at how it's going to be implemented," Fulmer said. "We've attended meetings of the [air quality] board in Fresno, two sets of meetings, trying to get a better understanding of how it will affect the school district, but we anticipate that it will increase our costs."

Although the school district incorporates measures in new buildings in an attempt to manage and reduce pollution, Fulmer said it is unclear whether those activities will contribute to reducing the air district's fees.

"We have an aggressive program of bringing on board compressed, natural gas, low polluting buses," Fulmer said. "We make an effort to identify bike routes, safe school routes for children walking and bicycling. And on the school sites, we have grassy areas and we plant a lot of trees that should help us reduce pollution. But we are still uncertain as to which of those things we do will meet the air board's requirements."

Although Fulmer said there are a great many unknowns for the school district about how the new rule is going to work, one thing is certain. Fulmer said the state will not provide additional money to pay for the increased building costs.

"We appreciate their goal and certainly we agree that we need to reduce pollution in the valley," Fulmer said. "We are just looking for a clear direction from the air board as to what [its] standards are going to be and what the options for mitigation are going to be."

While developers struggle with the unknowns of the new regulations, clean air advocates embrace the opportunity to improve air quality.

Carolina Simunovic, environmental health coordinator for Fresno Metro Ministries, an advocate of clean air policies, said that everyone must work together to ensure a clean and healthy environment.

"I think that all parts of the San Joaquin Valley society, all parts of industry, people, all individuals have to do their part to clean up the air," Simunovic said. "I think that the development industry, just like agriculture, just like oil, just like we are all doing in our own lives, needs to pitch in."

Simunovic said the San Joaquin Valley will see a tremendous benefit in decades to come from the implementation of the new regulations.

"I think that especially if developers take the rule to heart and build in a way that is smart for air quality, build in a way that car trips and bus trips and truck trips are actually reduced and not created, I think that we will see a significant benefit and a long-term benefit," Simunovic said.

Pollution Tips

Here are some things the valley air district is asking developers to do:

- ? Increase the number of sidewalks to encourage walking
- ? More bike paths
- ? Locations close to retail centers to minimize driving
- ? Gas jets for barbecuing to reduce the use of charcoal
- ? Incorporating videoconferencing into commercial centers
- ? Making houses more energy efficient

Source: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Burn restrictions end for season

Phil Hayworth

Tracy Press, Wednesday March 1, 2006

Starting today, you'll be able to spend all the time you want basking in the warm glow of a roaring fire.

The restrictions on burning wood in fireplaces and wood stoves ended for the 2005-06 season.

"Check Before You Burn," which runs November through February annually, aims to discourage or prohibit wood burning and cut wintertime air pollution.

This season, wood burning was prohibited once in San Joaquin County and at least once in each of the eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley. Stagnant winds forced the first valley-wide mandatory ban Dec. 13. The final prohibition of the season was declared Feb. 14 for the valley portion of Kern County.

"We had periods of high pressure over the valley, with weak winds and strong inversions, which allowed particulates to build up day after day," said Evan Shipp, supervisor of Air Quality Analysis for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. "The year before, we had more dynamic weather systems that moved across the valley and helped clear the air."

There were nine violations of the no-burning law recorded in the county this year. Last season, there were none.

When the Air District adopted the program in 2003, it was anticipated that valley residents could expect between four and 25 mandatory curtailments per season, depending on which county they live in. The first two years of the program saw only two to three mandatory curtailments per season.

Marchers see Fulton full of promise

Show of support for Fresno's downtown mall accompanies a report to City Hall on revitalization.

By Bethany Clough / The Fresno Bee
Wednesday, March 1, 2006

A vision of Fulton Mall's possible future was played out Tuesday: Crowds of shoppers and walkers bustled up and down the mall, break dancers spun on the pavement, a live band played, and a film crew shot a movie.

About 400 participants in the March on the Mall demonstrated what they thought a healthy Fulton Mall and Fresno should look like, before presenting a report detailing their vision of the city.

"Making the Grass Greener: Recommendations to Retain, Attract, Develop and Support Knowledge Workers" was offered to the Fresno City Council later in the day. The report's recommendations — such as improved public transportation and additional housing downtown — were assigned to city departments, with a promise that officials report back on progress in 60 days, City Manager Andy Souza said.

The report was put together by the Creative Economy Council, a task force created by the mayor and inspired by Council Member Henry T. Perea.

Fresno can end its brain drain of workers by making the city a place people want to move to, organizers said.

During the march, demonstrators carried signs describing the place they'd like the entire city to become: "Fresno, Clean Air Leader" and "Fresno, an Entrepreneurial Giant."

Marchers had their own visions of what downtown Fresno should be like.

"Parking would be better," said school psychologist Gloria Burrola. She also said she'd like to see the return of the vibrant Fulton Mall that existed when she moved here in 1981.

"It seemed to be alive," she said. "They had major department stores downtown."

Brandon Wright sat on a bench with his laptop, pretending to surf the Internet on a free wireless connection. That free service doesn't exist in downtown Fresno now, but is one of the recommendations in the report.

Wireless Internet already draws Wright to such places as the Tower District coffee shop JavaWava and would encourage him to spend more time downtown if it existed there, he said.

"I'd love to be able to hang out downtown," he said. "I'd love to be able to live downtown."

Bryant Williams sat playing chess with a co-worker as marchers passed by.

"In a major metropolitan city, I think that you'll see that," he said of people playing chess.

Williams acknowledged that anyone can play chess downtown now but said more businesses, including sushi and cigar shops, would draw more people and create an atmosphere for such sidewalk games.

Jose Anaya, who runs the hot dog and churro stand near the mall's clock tower and is there most days, wondered what all the fuss was about.

"I was like, 'What's going on?' Usually they do this on Cinco de Mayo," he said, gesturing to the band and crowds.

Anaya said the mall is usually busy on weekdays: "There's a lot of people, a lot of Hispanic people."

Marcher Miguel Arambula acknowledged the businesses and foot traffic that already exist on the mall but said more is needed.

"I think the idea of a downtown is to have it be representative of your city," he said. "Right now it's too separate. It's not representative of Fresno."

It may take a little more to get people from north Fresno to come downtown, said Tom Carrillo, who wore T-shirt reading, "C'mon, just say it ... I love Fresno."

He said diners tend to eat out within three miles of their home. That means downtown needs more housing to support restaurants or businesses need a more powerful draw.

"There has to be a buzz, like Cheesecake Factory," he said. "People in Fresno need a reason to come down here."

Some of the participants later gathered at City Hall to present the report, their ideas and encouragement to the City Council.

Eighteen speakers spoke in support of the report, representing organizations and interests from opera and a light rail system to parks and affordable housing.

Each recommendation was assigned a lead department to work on it.

At its April 25 meeting, the city will

Supervisor: Arnold's plan will help Visalia Conway speaks at State of the Chamber address

By Melinda Morales, Staff writer

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Calling Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's \$222 billion bond package "ambitious," Tulare County Supervisor Connie Conway told Visalia business leaders his approach will be good for local growth and development.

"A comprehensive overall package is I think what the governor is trying to put forth," she said, one that includes roads, schools, water and [air quality](#), among other things. The resulting benefits coupled with a streamlined government, protecting the environment and improving the overall quality of life, she said, "all adds to our economic strength. And that's what the Visalia Chamber of Commerce is interested in."

She delivered her remarks at the group's annual State of the Chamber luncheon Tuesday at the Lamp Liter Inn in front of nearly 200 business leaders.

The group gathered to hear also from outgoing board chairman Mark Perry and incoming 2006-07 board chairman Anil Chagan.

Perry said the chamber's new building at East Oak Avenue and North Santa Fe Street, which the organization is preparing to occupy next week, has captured most of the time and attention of its members, but it was just one of the priorities of the past year alongside forming a government affairs committee and the drive to increase membership.

"This is a very exciting time for us and the community," he said.

Chagan, the incoming board chairman for 2006-07, said the new building will give the chamber the means to expand programs and services to its members.

"It's exciting," Chagan said. "We're going to have an opportunity to serve our members a little better, and I look forward to an aggressive program."

Mike Cully, president and chief executive officer of the Visalia chamber, said he looks forward to working with Chagan.

"Anil has pledged to look at every program we have and evaluate it to see if it is in keeping with mission and the vision of our organization," he said, adding that some programs and services may ultimately be dropped and others added. He said the group plans to create a new set of bylaws with the purpose of staying in touch with the times.

Chagan said the new government affairs council was formed at the request of members, and he said he looks forward to implementing more of its members suggestions.

"We want to just represent business in the best way," he said.

He added that the chamber is working to attract additional large employers into the area, with an emphasis on the city's and chamber's goal of promoting agritourism.

"I feel strongly that tourism and convention business will stay strong in the Valley," he said.

Cully, who is nearing his two-year anniversary with the chamber, said the chamber as a whole must stay vital and relevant to be effective.

"We've done a lot in a very short time, but we're not done yet. We have to keep pushing and figuring out how to do things better," he said.

Big storm fizzles: Snow blankets Sierra Nevada, but prediction for huge precipitation canceled by rain shadow effect

By Seth Nidever, Sentinel Reporter
Hanford Sentinel Tuesday, February 28, 2006

HANFORD - It blew in, and it blew over.

Wild predictions of copious amounts of rain in the Hanford area yesterday fizzled as the Valley was largely bypassed.

"I've been hearing some wild predictions, and I'm not sure where they came from," said Jim Bagnall, a meteorologist from the National Weather Service office in Hanford.

The storm followed what Bagnall called "a classic rain shadow effect."

That means the coastal mountain ranges absorbed most of the moisture. Then as the storm moved over the Sierra Nevada and cooled, it dumped additional precipitation as rain and snow.

Elevations above 8,000 feet received from 2-4 feet of snow, Bagnall said.

But Valley rain amounts never got much above .10 inches, he added.

As of 4 a.m. today, Hanford had received .13 inches of rain, Bagnall indicated. High winds, however, buffeted the area with gusts over 40 miles an hour, prompting the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to issue a health warning on Monday for particulate matter.

A power pole fire at 14th Avenue and Lacey Boulevard inconvenienced motorists when emergency crews blocked the roadway.

But don't pack away your rain gear just yet. Scattered showers and maybe a few thunderstorms are possible today.

Then, after a brief lull with the possibility of more wind, the next shot of predicted rain is expected to hit late Wednesday night, Bagnall said.

The possibility of precipitation will linger through Friday, he indicated.