

Air District records increase in wood burning violations

Turlock Journal, Wednesday, March 3, 2021

The Valley Air District concluded its 2020-2021 Check Before You Burn season Sunday, ending one of the Valley's most challenging winters that saw an increase in no burn days and violations.

The Check Before You Burn Program takes place each winter from November through February, reducing the build-up of harmful PM2.5, which can have adverse effects on public health, aggravating heart and lung diseases such as asthma, emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In accordance with District Rule 4901: Wood Burning Fireplaces and Wood Burning Heaters, the District issues a daily wood-burning declaration and restrictions, based on the air quality forecast for each county. Regional high-pressure systems often cause pollutants to become trapped in the bowl-shaped San Joaquin Valley, creating high concentrations of PM2.5, that accumulate very quickly at ground level, resulting in poor air quality.

"The District's primary responsibility is protecting the health of San Joaquin Valley residents. This requires strict enforcement of rules that regulate emissions from activities such as residential wood burning," said Jaime Holt, District Chief Communications Officer.

During the 2020-21 season, Stanislaus County recorded 61 "No Burning Unless Registered" days, an increase from the 49 days of the previous season. The county also had one "No Burning for All" day, compared to zero from the 2019-20 season. The air district issued 197 notices of violation of the wood burning regulations, a significant uptick from the 71 violations issued in Stanislaus County during the 2019-20 season.

While no formal residential wood burning restrictions are in place from March 1 through the end of October, the District urges the public to refrain from burning any solid fuel, even when permitted. The San Joaquin Valley Air Basin faces unique air quality challenges, continually seeking every feasible control measure to protect public health and meet strict federal air quality standards for particulate matter pollution 2.5 microns and smaller (PM 2.5).

Residents are encouraged to upgrade from an open-hearth fireplace or older wood stove, to a cleaner device by taking advantage of the District's Burn Cleaner incentive program, which provides up to \$3,000 for cleaner devices such as, electric heat pumps, natural gas inserts, or certified wood burning devices (in certain areas). Visit www.valleyair.org/burncleaner for program guidelines.

For more information on the Check Before You Burn Program, visit: www.valleyair.org/rule4901/ or call the District office in Modesto at 209-557-6400.

No-burn days more than quadrupled during the season, which ended Sunday

The Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, March 2, 2021

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District reported Tuesday it issued more than four times as many no-burning declarations in Kern County between November and February than it did during the same period in 2020-21.

The air district said it put out 44 declarations telling the public no one in the county is permitted to burn solid fuel during the four-month Check Before You Burn season that ended Sunday. It issued only 10 such statements in Kern during the same period a year earlier.

Meanwhile, notices of violations issued in Kern rose 11 percent from 66 in the 2019-20 period to 72 in 2020-21.

The notification system is intended to reduce the severity of air pollution on days when airborne particulate matter 2.5 microns and smaller reach harmful levels. The air district says PM2.5, as such pollution is called, aggravates heart and lung diseases such as asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

The agency also urged local residents to continue to refrain from burning solid fuel and added anyone looking to upgrade from an open-hearth fireplace or older wood stove to something cleaner should consider taking advantage of its Burn Cleaner incentive program.

The program provides up to \$3,000 for equipment such as electric heat pumps or natural gas inserts. Information is available online at www.valleyair.org/burncleaner.

Arvin, Lamont to receive resources from community air protection program to address air pollution

Kern Sol News, Monday, March 1, 2021

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has confirmed the Valley Air District's recommendation of Arvin/Lamont as the next community selected in the San Joaquin Valley to benefit from additional resources provided by Assembly Bill (AB) 617, the Community Air Protection Program.

Since the bill was passed in 2017, the South Kern community has been nominated by organizations and has nominated itself every year to benefit from the program. And now their hard work is paying off.

The AB 617 program, now in its third year of implementation, is designed to improve quality of life for the California's most disadvantaged communities through community-led efforts to identify and address local air pollution concerns. This program brings more resources to the Valley Air District's longstanding efforts to develop and implement regulatory and incentive-based clean air strategies throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

"A decade of advocacy in environmental justice finally pays off," tweeted Gustavo Aguirre Jr., the projects coordinator with Central California Environmental Justice Network. "Of course, this is just the beginning."

The South Kern community is excited and also relieved that their community has been chosen for this project, Aguirre said.

"There is a sense of joy and a sense of hope," Aguirre said of the community's reaction to the news. "Finally, the community's work is paying off, and they have the ability to participate."

AB 617 requires the Valley Air District to make recommendation to CARB for their annual consideration of additional communities to implement community air monitoring plans and/or community emissions reduction programs. CARB's selection of Arvin/Lamont came during last week's board meeting in Sacramento.

The South Kern community will have to create a Community Steering Committee, which will then create Community Air Monitoring Plan (CAMP) and a Community Emissions Reduction Plan (CERP).

With the CAMP, residents, industry leaders and government officials will be able to identify areas that are in the most need of monitoring. Residents will also have access to real-time data for the first time in about a decade.

"The residents will be able to identify where they believe pollution comes from, whether from the community, industrial site, or traffic," Aguirre said.

The CERP is a living document of strategies that will accomplish the reduction of pollution in the community. The committee will need to determine sources of pollution and will call on residents to give input on where monitoring needs to take place.

The community of Arvin/Lamont is the fourth community within the San Joaquin Valley to be selected for the program following Shafter, South Central Fresno and Stockton. Shafter received nearly \$29 million from the project to improve the environment. Some of the ideas that have come from Shafter meetings include implementing electric charging stations and using electric school buses. Currently, one Shafter school district is looking at the feasibility of installing charging stations for electric buses, according to Aguirre.

The District invites residents, businesses and other community stakeholders from the Arvin/Lamont area to participate in the formation of a community steering committee that will assess community needs and work on a Community Air Monitoring Plan (CAMP) and Community Emissions Reduction Program (CERP) during the upcoming year. For those interested in participating in the committee or future meetings, reach out to Aguirre at gustavo.aguirrejr@ccejn.org.

“We’re very excited to move forward with the formation of a steering committee and for the opportunity to work more closely with the City of Arvin and the community of Lamont to understand their concerns and determine how new clean air resources and strategies can be best applied in the community,” said David Couch, Valley Air District Governing Board member and Kern County Supervisor.

The Valley Air District is a public health agency whose mission is to improve the health and quality of life for all Valley residents through efficient, effective and entrepreneurial air quality management strategies.