

EDITORIAL: New wood-burning rules will save Valley lives

By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board



New wood-burning rules will save lives in the Valley. Make sure your fireplaces are equipped to meet the new rules.

BEE FILE

Who doesn't love a crackling wood fire on a cold day?

Answer: People with asthma, allergies and heart conditions.

So while many of us — if not most of us — love the smell of burning almond or oak and the sight of flickering flames, the right thing to do is to comply with the San Joaquin Valley's new wood-burning regulations.

The new rules are expected to shut down most wood burning in fireplaces, older stoves and inserts from Nov. 1 to Feb. 28. These fireplaces and older heaters create more than 90% of the Valley's soot pollution. The only exceptions during this time will be when a storm scours harmful pollution out of the air.

We wish the rules — some say they are the toughest in the country — weren't necessary. But our Valley's unique pollution-retaining shape and federal health standards leave us with no other options.

The Bee's Mark Grossi wrote in an Oct. 31 story on the new regulation:

"As one of the dirtiest air basins in the country, the Valley needs dramatic cutbacks in fireplace soot, which is among the most dangerous air pollutants. On the worst winter days, soot is about a third of the particle pollution hanging in

the air over neighborhoods."

Some folks are bound to be angry with the rule. They'll view it as infringing on their freedom — another example of California nanny-state politics.

But if they think about a loved one coughing all winter or dying prematurely because a neighbor burns wood in the fireplace all winter, they might change their tune.

Good neighbors respect and support each other. Sacrificing the ambience of hearth and logs is a small price for significantly improving somebody's health.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is backing the rules with a carrot-and-stick approach.

Homeowners can get up to \$1,500 for certified inserts, which can cost up to \$5,000 or more. Applicants who qualify as low income can get up to \$2,500. Another \$500 is available for those who are converting to natural gas, which is exempt from all restrictions because it burns so cleanly.

Beware: The district is cracking down on violators. Fines start at \$50 and can climb as high as \$1,000 for repeat offenders.

If you still think this is much ado about nothing significant, you are wrong. Dozens of lives will be saved this winter by the new rules, district officials say.

One of those spared might be someone you know.

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