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HOLIDAY TRADITIONS CAN IMPACT AIR QUALITY

November 19, 2009 - The Thanksgiving holiday weekend can have poor air quality due to high particle concentrations primarily from residential wood burning according to the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District. “Combining weather conditions and an increase of wood burning during the holiday weekend can create poor air quality which contributes to health problems,” stated Mat Ehrhardt, executive director. “Temperature inversions trap smoke from residential wood burning and other particle forming emissions during cooler weather. This trapping causes unhealthy particulate levels to stay within neighborhoods,” added Ehrhardt.

The District reminds residents of the voluntary “Don’t Light Tonight” program which discourages the use of wood burning stoves and fireplaces especially on cold nights when temperature inversions contribute to an unhealthy situation. Residents can sign up at www.ysaqmd.org to receive “Don’t Light Tonight” advisories through Enviroflash, an electronic notification program. An advisory is issued when the forecast for particulate pollution is 25 micrograms or greater or a 74 or higher on the Air Quality Index (AQI).

If wood burning is the sole source of heat in a home, pellet stoves, EPA-certified woodstoves or fireplace inserts, and natural-gas fireplaces are encouraged as cleaner burning alternatives over traditional fireplaces. Woodsmoke, which can cause adverse reactions in children, the elderly and those with respiratory conditions, can be significantly reduced over a traditional fireplace. In addition to using a cleaner alternative, residents should follow these steps:

- (1) Always burn small pieces of aged, dry hardwood. Unseasoned wood has more moisture which causes fire to smoke. Choose pellets over wood when possible as they burn 50% cleaner and with less ash clean up.
- (2) When storing wood, stack it under cover in a dry ventilated area. Freshly cut wood needs to be stored for about eight to twelve months before burning.

- (3) Never burn household trash or chemically treated or painted wood. It pollutes the air and can produce poisonous gases.
- (4) Stack wood loosely so air circulates around it which reduces heavy smoke emissions.
- (5) Keep the flame active. Your fire should only smoke when you first light it and when you add extra fuel (and then only for a few minutes).
- (6) Don't let your fire smolder overnight – keep enough air in the fire to maintain a flame.
- (7) Check your chimney regularly to see how well your fire is burning. If there is excess smoke coming from the chimney, increase the air supply to your fire.

The Yolo Solano Air Quality Management District, a public health agency, offers a free brochure “Light It Right” with additional tips on wood burning. The District is dedicated to protecting human health and property from the harmful effects of air pollution. For a current update on “Don't Light Tonight,” call the information line at 530-757-3787 or sign up for electronic notifications at www.ysaqmd.org. For information on the District's programs and services call (530) 757-3650 or visit www.ysaqmd.org.

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